

**THE SITE OF OLD
"JAMES
TOWNE", 1607-1698**

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The Site of Old "James Towne", 1607-1698 by Samuel H. Yonge

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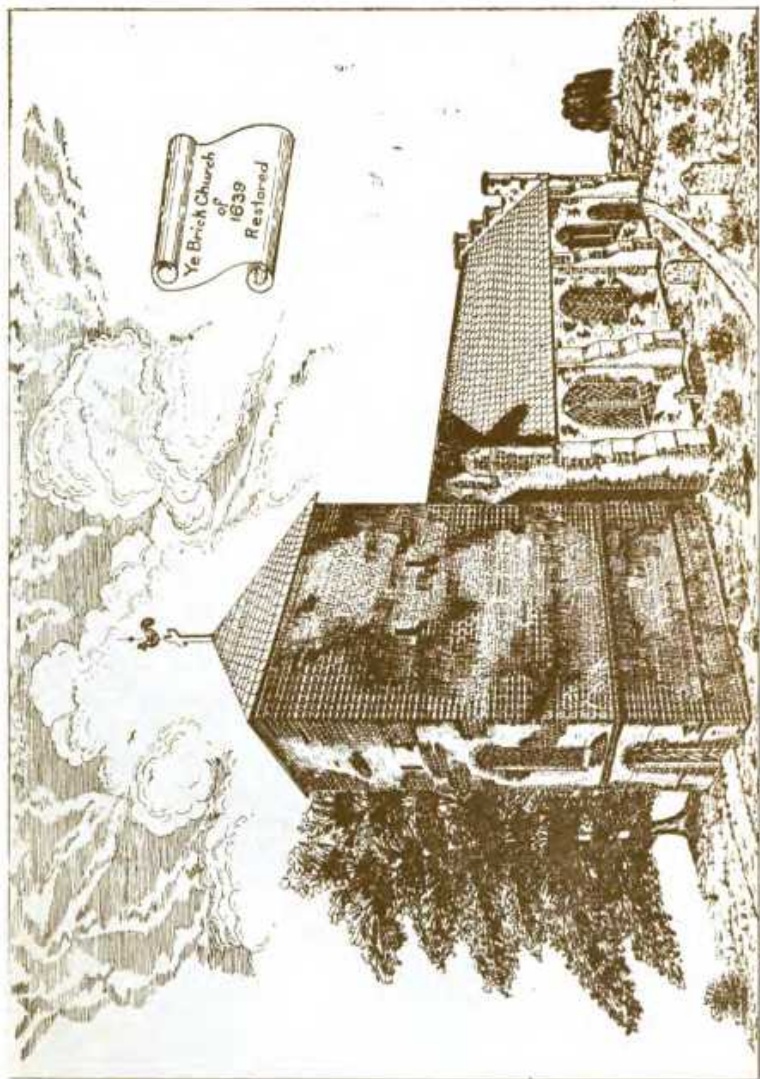
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SAMUEL H. YONGE

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"JAMES
TOWNE", 1607-1698**



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The Use of Old Buildings Formed 1877-1900

The Site of Old "James Towne," 1607-1698.

A Brief Historical and Topographical Sketch

OF THE

First American Metropolis,

Illustrated with Original Maps, Drawings and
Photographs,

BY

SAMUEL H. YONGE.



PUBLISHED BY THE
ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF VIRGINIA ANTIQUITIES.
RICHMOND, VA., 1904.

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WM. ELLIS JONES,
PRINTER,
RICHMOND, VA.

IN publishing this edition of "The Site of 'Olde James Towne,'" the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities desires to gratefully acknowledge its indebtedness to the author.

Mr. Yonge's many services—as engineer, in preserving the island from the inroads of the river, and as an antiquary in bringing to light the buried remains of the old town, in giving its public buildings and homes, again, a local habitation and a name, and in writing its history—will ever connect his name with Jamestown.

The Association tenders its grateful thanks to Mr. Yonge for his generous gift of all rights to this edition of his exceedingly valuable book.

MRS. JOSEPH BRYAN,
President A. P. V. A.

ERRATA.

Page 6, lines 25 and 26, "Sir Francis Wyatt's first administration" should read "Sir Thomas Gates' term."

Map of "James City," on John White plat, "1643" should be "1644."

Index to map of "James City," reference 7, insert at beginning of line the words "Site of."

Ditto, reference 12, change "1643" at end of line to "1644."

Page 15, line 7, change "erosion" to "rate."

Page 16, line 6, change "1643" to "1644."

Page 18, line 10, change the comma after "vessels" to an apostrophe.

Page 18, lines 28 and 29, bracket the phrase "during Sir Thomas Smith's administration."

Page 42, line 1, change "is" to "in."

Page 70, line 24, change "petition" to "partition."

The Site of Old "James Towne," 1607-1698.

By SAMUEL H. YONGE.

INTRODUCTION.

IT was the author's privilege to have charge, under the direction of the United States Engineer Department in 1900 and 1901, of the work of protecting Jamestown Island from the encroachments of James River.

Before proceeding with the above work an attempt was made to learn the cause and extent of the encroachments. The former was soon discovered to be abrasion by wave action, while the latter, on account of the available evidence being meager and uncertain, could not be satisfactorily determined.

The abraded area at first appeared to be upwards of fifty acres, having its greatest width, about three-eighths of a mile, at the northwestern extremity of the island.

While the protection work was under construction new evidence offered, in the light of which the above area appeared too large. This led to making personal researches among all available sources of information, which have occupied the leisure moments of a period of two years.

The results of the above investigation, with regard to the site of the former town, presented in the accompanying monograph, are at variance with the statements of other modern writers.

There are but two descriptions available of the island and town after the latter had passed beyond the transitional stage of a military post, by writers of the time having a personal knowledge of the localities; one by an anonymous writer in about 1676, the other ten years later by the Rev. John Clayton. Both descriptions are quite incomplete. Supplemented by information from other sources, however, they have considerable value, especially that by Mr. Clayton.

In the description of the town by Mr. Richard Randolph, the antiquarian, published in 1849, in the *Virginia Historical Register*, Vol. II, pages 138 and 139, occurs the following:

"I will only add that the great body of the town, which, however, was never very large, was certainly west of the Old Steeple still visible, and is now entirely, or very nearly, submerged in the river. This is clearly proved by the old deeds for lots in the town recorded in the office of James City County Court, which call for bounds that are now under water, and more palpably, by vast numbers of broken bricks and other relics of building that may still be seen in the western bank at low tide."

It is evident from the above quotation that Mr. Randolph was not aware of the fact now disclosed that after about 1623 the greater part of the village was east of the tower ruin. The reasons for his belief that almost the entire town was west of the ruin were probably the following: During about the last three and a half decades of the town's existence the public buildings, as will be shown in the following pages, were west of the tower, on which fact, no doubt, the tradition was founded that the whole town was in that neighborhood; and, as only the western bank of the island was subsequently attacked by the waves, and consequently the foundations of former buildings of that quarter alone were exposed to view by abrasion of the bank, the above tradition was apparently confirmed; further, after the last state house and other buildings were burned in 1698, the standing parts of buildings in the entire town were, in the course of time, obliterated by the town site being put under cultivation and the brick formerly composing the buildings being removed; and, finally, on account of the long interval—a century and a half—between the town's abandonment as the seat of government, by which its few inhabitants, composed principally of resident state officials and tavern keepers, were compelled to remove, and that of a revival of any very great interest in the town, the traditions depended on for fixing its position had become dim and defective.

From what follows it appears that writers of later date than Mr. Randolph accepted and reflected his views, without proper investigation.

According to Bishop Meade, in his *Old Churches and Families*