

# NGS 2023 Family History Conference

## Virginia is for Family History Lovers

Mary O'Brien Vidlak, CG



*American Civil War Museum, photo by John Dixon*

You may recognize the iconic slogan, “Virginia is for Lovers.”<sup>1</sup> The National Genealogical Society 2023 Family History Conference, 31 May–3 June, in Richmond, Virginia, is for lovers of family history. It’s an opportunity for all of us who enjoy genealogy to indulge our passion with others who share it.

The local host society for the conference is the Virginia Genealogical Society (VGS). After being forced by COVID-19 to pivot to a virtual conference in 2021, we are excited to join with NGS in welcoming you to Richmond in-person! The theme of the conference, Virginia: Deep Roots of a Nation, recognizes the significant role Virginia played in the history of the United States. Regardless of whether your ancestors physically lived on this land, Virginia touched their lives.

Native Americans have resided here for approximately eleven thousand years; in 1607 the first permanent English settlement in North

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**Mary O'Brien Vidlak**, CG, was born and raised in New York. A move to Virginia in 2006 transformed her vague interest in family history into a passion when she found herself living near the homes of generations of her maternal ancestors. Mary is the former president of the Virginia Genealogical Society and continues to serve the society as treasurer. She is also a trustee of the Board for Certification of Genealogists.

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Websites cited in this article were viewed on 8 November 2022.

1. “Virginia is for Lovers,” *Virginia Tourism Corporation* (<https://www.virginia.org>).

America was founded in Jamestown; Africans were brought there in 1619; the final battle of the American Revolution was fought at Yorktown; Richmond was the Confederate capital in the Civil War; eight US presidents were born here—and these are just a handful of the ways Virginia has impacted the story of all our families.

We've planned some local tours and special events to entertain and inform you during your time in Richmond.

### Wednesday, 31 May

Six tours are planned for Wednesday. Each provides an opportunity to increase your understanding of the key role Virginia has played in the history of our nation and consequently, the history of your family.

On Wednesday morning you can experience a crucial event in American history during a visit to the **American Civil War**

**Museum.** The museum tells the story of the war through the experiences of diverse Americans. In two guided tours, you can immerse yourself on a human level in the chaos and complexity of these years and their aftermath. This visit includes a quarter-mile optional walk along the James River to more deeply delve into the story of Richmond women and children who worked on Brown's Island to produce ammunition and other military supplies.

Another option on Wednesday morning is a walking tour of **Jackson Ward** in downtown Richmond. Led by eighth-generation Virginian and fourth-generation Jackson Ward resident, Gary L. Flowers, this one-mile tour includes stops at twenty educational, economic, religious, and social institutions that inspired the names "Black Wall Street" and "Harlem of the South" and reflect the Ward's cultural and historical past.

A visit to the newly renovated and expanded **Virginia Museum of History and Culture**, formerly known as the Virginia Historical Society, is planned

for Wednesday afternoon. Tours at the museum cover the two permanent exhibits: The Story of Virginia, a linear history that lets you focus on the time periods when your ancestors lived in Virginia, and Our Commonwealth, an in-depth, multi-sensory journey that explores the culture of the state. The VMHC collections include a wide range of objects for future investigation—among them are genealogical materials, maps, glass plate negatives, and photographs, of particular interest to family historians.



*Courtesy of Virginia Museum of History & Culture*

Wednesday afternoon also offers a guided tour of the **Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Richmond.** This site, a short walk from the convention center, tells the inspirational stories of Black people and African Americans that are often ignored or forgotten. They are presented in the full context of American history to allow for a greater understanding of our history and the foundation of our diverse society.

Tours of the **Virginia State Capitol**, located several blocks from the convention center, will be offered in both the morning and the afternoon. Designed by Thomas Jefferson and first occupied in 1788, the Capitol is "the second oldest working statehouse in America."<sup>2</sup> In addition to the underground Capitol Extension and Rotunda, Jefferson Room, Old House Chamber, and Old Senate Chamber, the tour will visit the present-day legislative chambers located in the 1906 wings. Participants can visit the monuments located on the grounds of the Capitol after the tour.

Buses will take participants to the American Civil

2. "Capitol History," *Virginia State Capitol* (<https://virginiacapitol.gov/index.php/the-capitol>).

## War Museum and the Virginia Museum of History and Culture.

After a day of immersion in the history of the Commonwealth, you will be ready for the official opening of the Expo Hall, to join more lovers of family history and share your experiences from the day while checking out the multitude of offerings.

### Thursday, 1 June

The conference lectures begin on Thursday with the keynote address delivered by Christy S. Coleman, executive director of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation. For detailed information on her presentation and the conference program, see the NGS website.

This first day of the conference ends with a wonderful opportunity for Virginia researchers. The Library of Virginia will remain open that evening until 9 p.m., so conference attendees won't have to choose between lectures and research. The library's collection is "the most comprehensive resource in the world for the study of Virginia history, culture, and government."<sup>3</sup> In addition to these extended hours, the library will be open from Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. It will be closed for the Memorial Day weekend from Friday, 27 May, through Monday, 29 May.

### Friday, 2 June

Friday offers another occasion to socialize with fellow family history lovers. The Virginia Genealogical Society is hosting a cocktail hour and buffet dinner that evening. This informal event is designed to allow you to meet others doing research in the same geographic area of Virginia. You may find a relative or two. Or, if your research is not in Virginia, this event can be your chance to find attendees who share a particular area of interest such as Jewish records, African American research, or DNA. You'll enjoy regional beverages and cuisine while mingling with costumed interpreters representing the three cultures of early Virginia.

Following the meal, a speaker from the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation will present a talk on the convergence of cultures that occurred in the beginning of seventeenth-century Virginia. The

founding of Jamestown brought people from three distinct cultures together: Powhatans (an Eastern Woodlands tribe), West Central Africans, and English. The presentation will examine how interactions between the groups shaped the new Virginia colony and how their legacies live on in twenty-first-century America.

### Come early or stay longer

Take advantage of the convention hotel rate to come early or stay longer—or both—and experience even more of the history that makes Virginia so unique. The ultimate social history experience, Virginia's Historic Triangle—Jamestown, Yorktown, and Williamsburg—is located less than an hour's drive east of Richmond. As described by Dr. W. A. R. Goodwin, co-founder of Colonial Williamsburg, "Williamsburg is Jamestown continued, and Yorktown is Williamsburg vindicated." If you've never been there, this is the perfect time to visit this special area.

We can't wait to welcome you to our Virginia. There's so much here for lovers of family history. 🌳

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3. "Welcome from the Librarian of Virginia," *Library of Virginia* (<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/about/default.asp>). For details, see Virginia Dunn, "The Library of Virginia Welcomes Researchers," *NGS Magazine* 47:1 (January-March 2021), 19-24.