

# Jamestown's Ancestors & The Seminoles

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To answer the question:

*Does the unique pronunciation of English words, the dialect of Jamestown's generational residents, indicate a connection to the Seminole Indians of Florida?*



Some time in 1923, the community of Jamestown was platted. But that is not where it was born. Jamestown, a small community on Davenport's north side, crosses US Route 17-92, which means that there is both a west and an east side to this community. It forms one of three entrances into the historic area of Davenport.

Like so many other communities throughout the United States, the residents of Jamestown hold dear to their unique American accent. Theirs is just like any other American accent, including: Southern drawl, Yat of New Orleans, and the dialects from New York's boroughs, like Brooklyn or Queens. Accent is culture. Often you can tell where someone comes from simply by the way they pronounce their words.

I was told by a long-time resident I had befriended that the reason current residents in Jamestown have such a unique accent is because their ancestry is associated with the Seminole Indians, whose US-permitted reservation spanned a vast area in central Florida many years ago. As it turns out, Davenport is located smack-center in the region that the Seminole called home at one time, that is, until the soldiers and the settlers arrived.

The resident who gave me this nugget of information was nicknamed *Dollar*. His actual name was Benjamin Robinson.

He was a kind and friendly middle-aged man with sickle cell disease. He walked in front of my home every morning to soothe his disorder. He walked all the way from Jamestown to the then-vacant elementary school on Suwannee Ave. He attended that school when he was a kid. He told me that one time he cut the grass for the old lady who lived at my home long before I moved here myself. He told me how that person had paid him barely anything for chopping down nearly a quarter-acre of tall grass, and he told me how he felt about that. But he mostly told me about Jamestown.

I went there to Jamestown one day and walked around. I waved at a few folks sitting out in front of their homes, smiling. I wondered about its past. Where did these people come from? How did they end up next to a huge, dilapidated citrus processing plant? Why is the community divided in two: one section in Davenport (Jamestown) and the other in Polk County (Jamestown East)?

I resolved to find out one day and to research if there was any validity to Dollar's story that his own Jamestown ancestry may have included Seminole Indian. Here's what I found.



Throughout its 100+ year history with the city, Jamestown and its community have been treated like the letter *B* that somehow never seemed to fit between *A* and *C*. That letter *B* represents the link between Davenport's past, its current socio-economic state, and its future in so many ways that it's about time that the community of Jamestown be officially accepted by the City of Davenport, Florida, as a significant part of Davenport's true history and cared for in that status.

Jamestown's history is directly linked with Indian history in Florida. That dates back centuries, long before anyone else in the world had discovered the area located on a very big hill. Floridians named it *The Ridge*. Indians and Africans are part of The Ridge story.

Today, their fondness for each other formed the *Black Seminoles*, also known as Afro-Seminole. They are a group of African Americans and Native Seminoles, who, over these centuries coupled. These Floridians formed unique communities that were distinct from both African American and Native American cultures.

The arrival of Africans in Florida is recorded to have started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Their arrival, as victims of *slavery* – a last-century word that has been softened into the phrase *human trafficking enterprise* – is one of many foundational cornerstones in American history.

A number of slaves were able to escape their tyranny in northern plantations and headed south. Instead of befriending the settlers and the soldiers who were also arriving in the state, freedom-pursuing Africans joined the welcoming Seminoles, often living besides them and quite likely experiencing conjugal encounters with them, producing families.

They had commonality with each other: the Africans and Seminoles. Both groups were being impacted by the same foe from whom both had to flee, get pushed away or even killed. In addition, "what we do know for sure is that African and Native American populations had one thing in common: *resistance*." (***Black AF History***, 2023, Michael Harriot, p. 96.)

Then, sometime in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the settlers of Davenport began to arrive. To be clear, the settlers arrived after the formation of Afro-Seminole communities in central Florida, not before, nor even at the same time.

The New Americans arrived first as construction workers when they setup next to Horse Creek. They were there to put down tracks for a new railroad. The bulk of the future residents of Davenport came into the burgeoning community on this same track a bit later. Some of these new residents, it is said, included freed Africans from the southern states north of Florida.



Following is a synopsis of historical events and facts that pertain to both the history of Davenport and its Jamestown community.

**1823** - The [Treaty of Moultrie Creek](#), also known as the Treaty with the Florida Tribes of Indians, was an agreement signed with the US government that established a Seminole Indian reservation throughout the central Florida region. "This treaty was to be [in effect for 20 years](#) [until 1843] and would give the Seminoles four million acres of land, although none of the land was on the coast, where Seminoles could have easily traded with Cuba and other islands."

This action by the New Americans against the Indians was the earliest demonstration of the xenophobic nature of their culture at the time they arrived here. In fact, "the [settlers] who moved into Florida lived in fear of their Native American neighbors." (***The Heritage Trail from Horse Creek to Davenport***, Judith Torgersen Thompson, 2013, p. 13.)

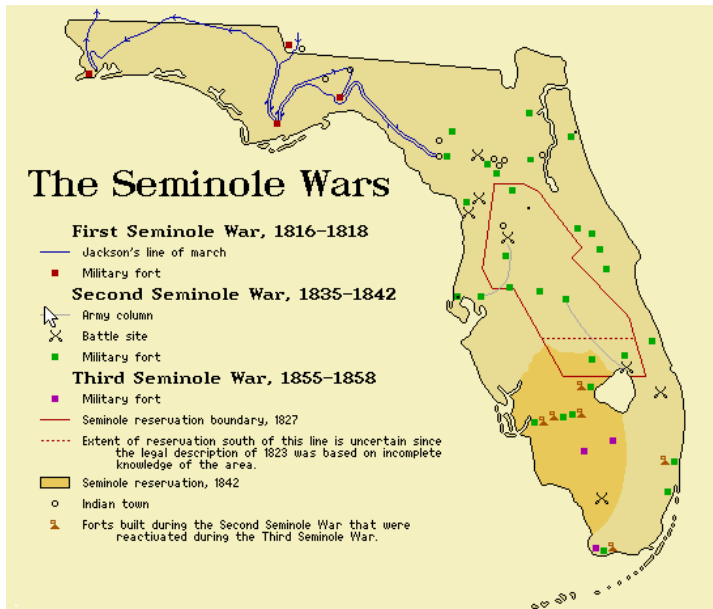


Figure 1 Florida map

But there weren't just Native Americans here. There were also African Americans and Afro-Seminole. Actually, it is safe to say that the settlers were literally afraid of them all. Yet, those they feared were here first.

**1830** – The Indian Removal Act went into effect.

**1832** – The U. S. government violated the Moultrie treaty, which gave the Seminoles the middle of Florida. They violated such by initially not upholding it and later by presenting the Seminoles with a new contract, the Treaty of Payne's Landing, which would have forced the residents to move again. Few signed-off on it. Regardless, the treaty went into effect and it affected every single Native, regardless if they had agreed with the treaty or not. The Seminole quickly learned that the word of the New Americans was not to be trusted.

**1835** – When the U.S. Army arrived in 1835 to enforce the terrible treaty, the Indians were ready for war. That started the Second Seminole War (1835 to 1842). It is reported that those who didn't fight primarily fled into the Everglades, as that was the direction in which the troops were pushing them. At the end of that war, the New Americans were quite satisfied that they had rid the peninsula of all Seminole people. They didn't.

"Part of the tribe moved. But other [Seminole refused to recognize the \[1832\] treaty](#) and fled ..." It is estimated that about "[300 Indians](#) ... managed to elude capture by the U.S. army in the 19<sup>th</sup> century."

Some of the successful ones, it appeared, may have settled in the yet undiscovered Davenport region on The Ridge. To be sure, it was a far less inhospitable area than the Everglades, where the majority fled, and it was far enough away from the closest fort (12 miles from Fort Davenport) so as to not alarm the soldiers. In actuality, it was during this period, when [both] forts and communities began to spring to life that "... groups seeking sanctuary from raids by slavers created new settlements ... Many of them exist to this day, their founding histories preserved and celebrated in oral traditions." (*The New History of Fighting Slavery*, Laurent Dubois, *The Atlantic*, February 2026, p. 87.)

That is what Jamestown's residents have done for well over a century. They maintained an oral history. They talked with each other and especially their children, through which they retained agency, regardless of the written history.

No record exists that anyone at Fort Davenport was aware of the settlement that had formed at Lake Play. The consensus is that Jamestown was formed with some, if not all, of the lake people.

**1835-1842** – The Seminoles and, quite likely, the Afro-Seminole in the area "engaged in a bloody guerrilla war against U.S. troops sent to round them up .... Eventually, the government wearied of the effort and withdrew its troops, leaving [the area] ... at peace." (*America's Fascinating Indian Heritage*, *Reader's Digest*, James Maxell, 1978, p. 107.)

**1858** - [About 200 Seminoles remained in Florida](#) when the Third Seminole War ended.

**HERITAGE:**

SEMINOLE INDIANS → AFRO-SEMINOLE

**GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS:**

LAKE PLAY → JAMESTOWN

**1881** – As surely as there were African Americans and Afro-Seminoles in the area, “... [Seminole Indians still lived in the area](#)” as well. [Davenport Historical Society (DHS)]. The settlers had not yet arrived in 1881.



Figure 2 **Left:** 1884 Trestle. You can see the new trestle behind it. **Right:** New Trestle (located next to Rt 547). Credit for 1884 Trestle image: Judith Torgersen Thompson, [The Heritage Trail from Horse Creek to Davenport](#), Second Edition Cover.

**1883** – A temporary construction camp was established near the Horse Creek train trestle that was being built. See Figure 2.

**1884** – In 1884, the South Florida Railroad was completed. It was about this time that the settlers had begun to arrive on The Ridge. The New Americans placed a boxcar next to the rail tracks and called it a post office. It was located north of present-day Jamestown, near where the now very-slim Horse Creek crosses Route 17-92.

**1910** – It is common knowledge in Davenport that the image shown in Figure 3 on page 5 is [a photograph taken of the future residents of Jamestown at their Lake Play location](#) before they were [moved](#) to the city’s northside with a promise of new homes and jobs. If any of them had Afro-Seminole ancestry, which appears to be likely, then it is entirely possible that at least some of today’s Jamestown generational<sup>1</sup> residents are descended from them, making the Lake Play people and now Jamestown **Davenport’s Original Residents**, not the settlers.

**1912** – The first post office was built next to Lake Play. (DHS.)

**1915** - Davenport was incorporated. This incorporation included the west side of Jamestown, but not the east, where Jamestown Cemetery is located.

**1923** – Jamestown west was platted by Holly Hill to be within the City of Davenport. The east side was platted two years later, adjacent but located within Polk County, diluting Jamestown’s political influence.

**1927** – [Holly Hill opened](#) for business. It’s a structure that divides Jamestown from its immediate neighbors to the south, *Uptown*, where the settlers decided to make their homes.

## Evidence of Violent Racism in Florida’s Past

**T**he issue of violence has been brought up due to the belief that Davenport has been a community in perpetual denial of its own racist past. As former President Barack Obama once told us: *Our nation has a history*. Who could deny that? For those with high melanin content, the bad part of that history never seems to go away.

Davenport was no different from any other place in the United States and is just like any other region grappling with a racist past. However, unlike more and more communities, Davenport has still not addressed this historical error.

Throughout Florida, there was mob violence against minorities, community-wide massacres, and homes set ablaze right down to the grounds on which they stood. While the racism in Davenport never rose to the level of those heinous actions, it still happened. While, back then, it affected fellow human beings during a time when racism was acceptable, this past still affects them today.

**1920 – Ocoee, Florida** - On November 2, an Anglo mob, reacting violently to the news that an African-American man had tried to cast his vote in their election, massacred African-American residents.

**1922 – Jay, Florida** - 175 African-American residents fled the town after the death of an Anglo farmer who was shot by a African-American farmer in self-defense.

**1923 – Rosewood, Florida** - A violent Anglo mob attacked the predominantly African-American community of Rosewood, Florida, over several days in January. As many as 200 people were killed with almost every building burnt to the ground.

## Theories & Stories

It is this 1910 photograph, Figure 3, that I have stared at for countless hours, that helped to connect the dots for me. Historical consensus is that this photograph is the community that was moved from Lake Play to current-day Jamestown.

In Figure 3, you can see a number of two-story structures. In the background, there appears to be pine trees, probably slash pine. Also back there is a water tower, located more or less in the same general area as another, taller Davenport tower that the city unforgivably razed in December 2014. This image appears to have been taken in a northerly direction and east of the city's fire station on West Palmetto Street. That photograph was taken five years before

Davenport was incorporated in 1915, and it was taken two years before the Horse Creek post office was moved to Lake Play.

There are theories about the movement of these people from Lake Play, but one lingering question: Was it voluntary or not?

From that question, I found some stories to explain the disappearance of the people from Lake Play. In the end, there are three Jamestown origin stories, none of which may ever be conclusively proven to be true.

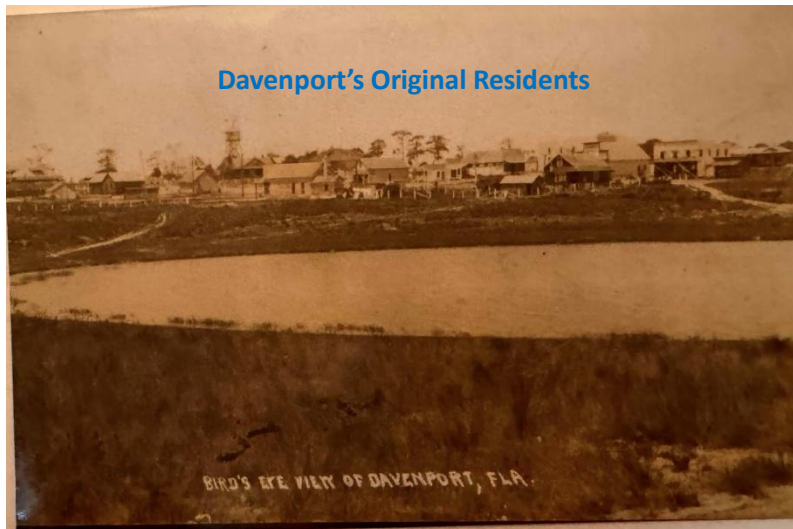
The first and most lasting story says that the residents by the lake moved **voluntarily** to new housing in Jamestown, provided for free by a company named Holly Hill. No one knows the exact

year this happened but the general consensus is that it happened. It is said that many of the people from Lake Play were Holly Hill employees.

To be sure, they got their new houses, but these were built without floors and were adjacent to a swampy area that encroached Jamestown during heavy rains. Then, the company all but closed, leaving Jamestown with a huge hole in their economy. There were no more jobs starting long before Holly Hill officially closed and zero by 2004.

That was one story. Now, another story goes like this.

The residents of Lake Play were **forced** to move to the floorless housing that Holly Hill built. I've heard locals say that these people should have been "grateful" to have gotten new houses, even without floors. That statement never made sense to me, as I know that I wouldn't have been grateful for a home without a floor.



**Figure 3** Before Jamestown – Homes Around Lake Play, circa 1910. Source: Davenport Historical Society.

Then I looked again at the 1910 Lake Play photograph. When I studied it, I understood that the prevalent theory was that these residents moved *voluntarily*, but that was somehow out of whack with what I was seeing in that image. It was not consistent with logic.

To get this straight: In exchange for moving to Jamestown, these people were given floorless housing in an area that was formally known for flooding and swampland, when their current homes on the lake didn't carry those risks.

As you can see from the 1910 photograph, the residents had two-story homes, some on stilts, that surely had floors on their second levels. Why wouldn't they have had floors on their first levels?



Figure 4 Enhanced image of Figure 3.

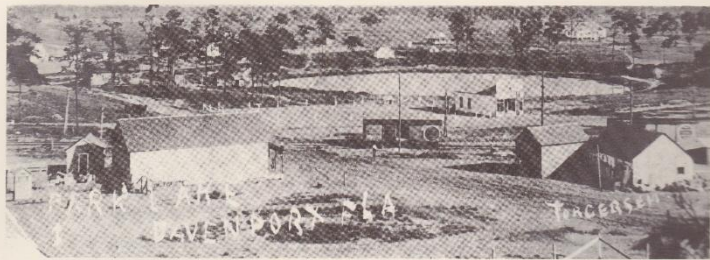
The only other option, then, is that these folks were somehow **pushed** off their properties. While there is no indication as to why these residents may have left their lakefront homes, it stands to reason that no right-thinking, common-sense individual would have voluntarily moved from a perfectly decent, lakefront home to a house in a swampy area with no floor. Do you know anyone who might be grateful for that?

The third story is this: Because of the new rail system that was run near Lake Play, those homes were all destroyed by fire. Given the number of wooden structures near the new rail tracks, which did throw sparks, fire was a possibility. So was racial bias.

Regardless, the people in those 1910 homes in Figure 3 were **Davenport's Original Residents**. Whether forced or voluntary, some of those people went to Jamestown with the promise of jobs at Holly Hill. Those jobs in that plant, however, at best, lasted until about 2004, when it officially closed. Holly Hill sits today mostly neglected, a clear reminder of Davenport's past, the part where the letter *B* was dropped from Davenport's alphabet.

## The Gap

In Figure 5 you will notice that all of the homes of the Lake Play people are nowhere in this newer 1917 photograph of Lake Play. Because of this newer image, we know that the former Lake Play residents were no longer there by about 1917. However, if the new post office at Lake Play was built after the Lake Play people had left, then they were no longer there two years after the Figure 3 photo was taken. However, Jamestown in 1917 hadn't even been platted. So, from Lake Play, where did they go?



LAKE PLAY or PARK LAKE as it was sometimes called (about 1917). This photo was probably taken from the Delson store or the top of the old water tower. McConnell's store, in front of lake, was formerly owned by Mr. Brotchie.

In the upper right corner is the first Davenport schoolhouse — on the site of the present school grounds.

[x]

Photograph by Gustaf Torgersen

Between the year 1917, when it is documented by photograph that the Jamestown community were no longer at Lake Play, as shown in Figure 5, and the year 1923, when Jamestown was platted next to Holly Hill, there is no information on the whereabouts of the Jamestown people of Lake Play. We're looking at a gap of between six and 11 years of lost history. Maybe sometime in the future there will be another Dollar to help us fill this void.

Figure 5 Structures around Lake Play, circa 1917. Source: **The Davenport Story**, Clarence Meyer & Phyllis McGill, p x.

## Conclusion

I opened this document by saying that Jamestown is the *B* missing from Davenport's *A*, its past, and *C*, its future. If that is true, then it stands to reason that the Seminole on The Ridge never disappeared. What I have explain in this document, instead, is that they coupled with Africans and produced families. Since it appears that there are no more pure Seminoles in Davenport, it makes *B*, the mixture of Africans and Seminoles into one community

**Davenport's Original Residents.** That's Jamestown.



Figure 6 City limits surrounding Jamestown East. 8-26-2025. Source: MyDavenport.org

A question like “*Who are Davenport’s original residents?*” can only be addressed by reckoning with a past full of decisions and non-decisions that put the people of Jamestown into their current state. About half of them (Jamestown East) are completely out of reach of any active elected representative. It is believed that the commissioner representing north-east Polk County, Martha Santiago, has never even been to the Jamestown area and may not even know it exists. Likewise, inside the city, not even one Black American has ever held an elected city governmental seat on the Board. And, get this. Over the entire history of Davenport, only four born-and-raised Jamestown residents have been employed by the city (Source: Davenport resident text, dated 5/4/26.)

Many on both sides of Jamestown are generational residents. And, many **need** (not *want*, but *need*) economic development help. The closure of Holly Hill, a large piece of prime commercial property in the middle of Davenport, has never been practically and functionally addressed by the city.

Today, Davenport has annexed properties all the way up to Ernie Caldwell Road but goes around Jamestown’s east side, creating a poor economic development model within the city in the way of a *donut hole*.<sup>ii</sup> It seems that now would be a good time to figure out how to annex a piece of Davenport’s history into the city proper.

And, finally, yes, it is concluded that my friend, Dollar, *Mr. Ben*, as I called him, was correct about the Afro-Seminole heritage that exists in Jamestown. Always was.

## A Way Forward

**W**hile the initial intention of this paper was not to make recommendations but simply to document a part of Davenport’s history, it has, nonetheless, led me to a few thoughts that could begin to mend the history between the city and the people of Jamestown. That assumes that the City of Davenport recognizes its need to mend its past errors and its written history, and that it is ready to improve the area to recognize their rightful place in the city’s history, as it sits today at the entrance to one of three main roads. (Yes, Jamestown is located at the place in which is many of our drivers’ and cyclists’ get their first impressions.) First thing, though, some facts:

- ❖ [Educator Jane Elliott](#) tells us that we are all members of the same race: the human race. “This human race started with black women over 300,000 years ago.”
- ❖ Secondly: Diversity is good. Racism, bad. Equity is good. Poor, bad. Inclusion of all of history is plenty good, but exclusion? Well, you know.
- ❖ Thirdly: Racism doesn’t exist all on its own. It was created by humans. Therefore, it can also be eradicated by humans.

The initial step is to look at the issues that brought it on in the first place. Then, address them. For example, a once thriving orange business that went bust. Address it. The lack of representation for Jamestown East. Address it. The needed curbing, landscaping, and parking for Jamestown Park. Address it. Replacing the building that housed the Jamestown after-school program (destroyed by Hurricane Ian in 2022). Address it. The unification of Jamestown East and

West. Address it. Capturing a part of history not previously recognized by the city. Address it. And, this list keeps growing the longer the city ignores that it has an issue that must be solved.



Over the years, I have suggested to Davenport elected officials that the city give the property owners in Jamestown East a tax break in exchange for their annexation into Davenport. You know, bring them in. The response?

Every single government official I talked with about this matter immediately said, “No.”

Then in 2025, on bringing up this same subject, I was told that the people who live in this area do not want code enforcement and do not want the police. Given what is known by this author about their history with these two entities, their demands are valid. Considering their place in Davenport history, the least that elected officials can do is listen to them. Likewise, the city – not infinite but certainly with vastly more resources than all of the people living in Jamestown put together – should recognize its ability to negotiate for a mutually agreeable result. It’s time to address them with the dignity they deserve as human beings and with a newfound respect for the letter B that they have been for well over 100 years.



And, wouldn’t you know it, a solution has presented itself in cities throughout our nation. These cities have made it suitable and even beneficial for any community in the U.S. to deal with their own past and historical errors, such as racism. Richmond, Virginia, is the greatest example to date.

***THEIR INSIGHT REFLECTED A MINDSET OF 21ST CENTURY CIVILITY AND AN END TO ITS RACIST PAST.***

They removed all of their Confederate monuments, then placed them in more appropriate locations. Then they re-designed their historic and much-loved Monument Avenue to display the work of local sculpturers, reflecting a mindset of 21<sup>st</sup> century civility and an end to its racist past. In short, they made themselves accountable for the history that was not left behind but still around, impacting the quality of life of their residents.

That is what the City of Davenport must do. We need to hold ourselves accountable for our racist past and recognize that Jamestown is an integral part of Davenport history. We need to squash the lingering racism that impacts the quality of life for our residents in Jamestown.

They are a significant part of our history. They connect A with C. They are our missing letter B.

## Recommendations

- T**he City of Davenport’s stated commitments include:
- Building the public’s trust
  - Improving residents’ perception of government
  - Accountability

Regarding accountability: Since the City of Davenport has failed to recognize its own involvement in the problem of racism towards Davenport’s original residents stretching back to the arrival of the settlers and since that is the primary reason why Jamestown exists as it does today, I present to you, the reader, with the following good and cost-effective ideas. This is what I recommend.

DAVENPORT'S HISTORY IS BEAUTIFUL,  
BUT ONLY IF ALL OF IT IS TOLD.

THANK YOU, MR. BENJAMIN  
ROBINSON, FOR WHAT YOU TOLD ME  
ABOUT DAVENPORT HISTORY.

TRUTH MATTERS.

### The DHS Museum

- At the top of the Jamestown exhibit, place a large photograph of the Bird's Eye View of Davenport, FLA. Title the image **Davenport's Original Residents**, as in Figure 3.

### Davenport Board of Commissioners

- Direct the DHS to implement the previous recommendation.
- Direct both the city manager and DHS to correct their written and/or online histories.
- Name a special committee of residents, who have never been on a city committee before, to develop a plan of action to improve the socio-economic standing of the Jamestown area to include the Holly Hill commercial property and Jamestown East.

## Postscript

**A**t the DHS museum, you can find a photograph of the Bowens family, a mixed-race couple and one of Davenport's earliest residents. Their skin lights the image with their high melanin content and with facial features that express a distinctive Afro-Seminole appearance. Because of the clarity of the photograph, it presents as absolutely beautiful. Davenport history is also beautiful, but only if all of it is told.

We need to welcome home Jamestown.

All of it.

###

<sup>i</sup> *Generational* is defined for this document as those who are generally more than about 20 years away from the current generation's newborns, such as grandparents, great grandparents, etc.

<sup>ii</sup> A *donut hole* in the context of city limits refers to an area of land that is surrounded by a city but is not incorporated into it, often leading to confusion and distrust about services and governance.