

The Spirit of 18th-Century Theater



By: Alex Morse | May 4, 2020 | 5 Minute Read



Jug Broke Theatre brings the site of the first theater rebuilt in North America alive to entertain and educate all ages

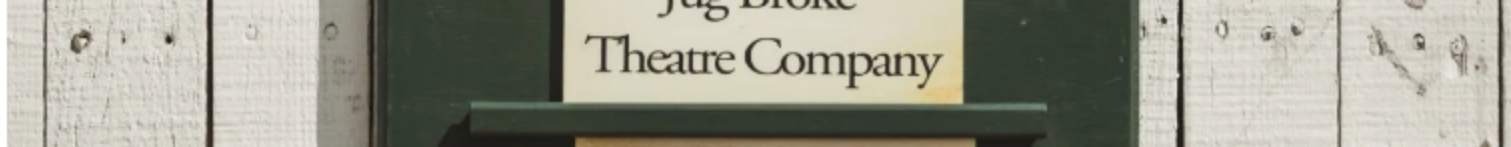
The year: 1665. The place: Accomack County, Virginia. Three guys drinking at a tavern struck up a play entitled, *The Bear and the Cub*. A patron at the bar saw the production and was highly offended. This patron was so offended at the performance that they sued the three actors for lewdness. At the trial, the judge asked to see the performance and after seeing the show, the judge ruled in favor of the actors by finding them “not guilty” and making the accuser pay all the court costs. And that is unquestionably the first positive review of theater in America.



Virginia has always had a welcoming attitude to theater, Williamsburg particularly. That is in part due to the role that theater played in the lives of English men and women. In London, two Royal play houses that held upwards of 2,000 people a night would run shows nine months a year, six nights a week. Each night was a main piece (five acts) and an after piece (one to two acts). All levels of society could and would come to the theater. In an attempt to immortalize the society of London, Colonial Virginians supported theater by allowing play houses to be built and the professional players to perform here in Williamsburg.

Today, Colonial Williamsburg's efforts to tell the story of theater lives on. Though there is no actual theater (the structure), there is theater (the trade). Formed in 2016, The Jug Broke Theatre Co. performs both 18th-century and original music and theater. We can primarily be found performing at the Play House Stage, which is built on the lot of that first theater. They were formed to bring that site alive with theater and to entertain and educate all ages. The mission of this theater company is simple: to create the spirit of the 18th-century theater. And Williamsburg is the best city to perform that story with all the theater history here. From the first theater rebuilt in British North America to the first performance of a professional theater company in America in 1752, Williamsburg has a theatrical story to tell.



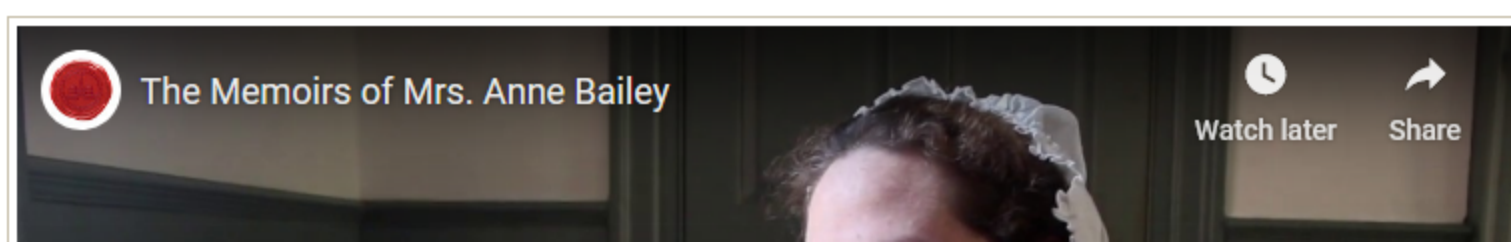


The Jug Broke Theatre Co. uses history as a resource for endless stories. Focusing on the 18th century, the troupe looks at the whole world at that time and researches how Williamsburg and Virginians may have played a part. Once the story is found, research and writing begin. We exhaust period plays, poems, and songs for how language is written and spoken. We incorporate period acting techniques. We compose original and period pieces to create the sound of the past. We craft and construct sets and props for each show. We construct the story to transport our audiences of all ages to an imaginative sphere to where — though there is no physical building — our audiences can experience the spirit of the 18th-century theater with all their senses.



And where do we do all this work? You can find the Jug Broke Theatre Co. all over the colonial capital. Home base is basically the site of the first theater, and we consider that a huge privilege to be able to perform on the ground where theater began in Williamsburg and the British Colonies. Once we reopen, we look forward to returning to our schedule on the Play House Stage: six days a week, Monday-Saturday. But you can also find us at the Raleigh Tavern, The Hennage Auditorium, Chowning's Tavern, and on social media, where we also produce digital content for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Our social media productions include *Memoirs of Anne Bailey*; watch here:





Others include *Love At a Distance* and 18th-century ballad opera *Love in a Village*. All these works are based on actual 18th-century works. History has so many stories for us to share with folks and we will continue to find fun and imaginative ways to theatrically produce those stories so that they may continue to live on. [Join our Facebook Group](#) here to be sure not to miss our next hit. You can also download our album “Welcome Here Again” by The Waterman Family available anywhere you digitally download, including [on Spotify here](#).

Alex Lee Morse is the Supervisor and one of the original founding employees of the Jug Broke Theatre Co. He has been with the Foundation for 12 years collectively. He enjoys listening to his children tell stories and loves the sound of words.

RESOURCES



The Colonial American Stage, 1665-1774: A Documentary Calendar by Odai Johnson & William J. Burling

Public Domain under these titles: *Memoirs of Anne Bailey*, *The Lady's Valentine Reader* and *Love in a Village* by Isaac Bickerstaff.

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