

Gloucester's Rosewell Ruin marks 300th anniversary with events

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Wilford Kale

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GLOUCESTER — A Remembrance Structure, which has been erected at Rosewell, will be dedicated at 3 p.m. on Sunday in celebration of “past resilience” of those who once walked and lived at the Gloucester County plantation.

The dedication ceremony is one of two events planned over the next few weeks at Rosewell, which is marking the 300th anniversary of its construction. The next, on June 8, is a first-person drama that tells the story of John Page, Gloucester County and the American Revolution.

The Fairfield Foundation, which maintains the historic Rosewell Ruin site, said the newly completed Remembrance Structure “stands today as a bridge between history and hope and is a testament to those (enslaved persons) who endured there.”

“These people lost families and communities when brought here against their will to build Rosewell, wait on their enslavers and raise crops that enriched the landowners,” the Rev. Ward Warren, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Ordinary, said in a news release.

The Fairfield Foundation, a nonprofit organization on Virginia's Middle Peninsula, is designed to support archaeological and historic preservation and associated educational programs. It is committed to community outreach and "will use the Remembrance Structure for educational purposes, to teach and to invite inquiry," the release said.



A service dedicating the Remembrance Structure, which stands in the shadow of the Rosewell Ruin, will be held on the nearby grounds on June 1 at 3 p.m. (Courtesy of the Fairfield Foundation)

"Through education, we empower future generations to learn, to question and to lead with knowledge and compassion," said the Rev. Katrina Brown, partially retired and associate pastor at Bethel Baptist Church in Gloucester. "May every child who visits these grounds and passes through these doors feel the strength of the past, embrace the truth of the present and shape a future with justice, unity and promise."

The Fairfield Foundation's co-director, Thane Harpole, said telling a more complete story of Rosewell is crucial. The Rosewell Plantation, once the most elaborate house in colonial Virginia, was the home of the Page family and hundreds of enslaved people; it was destroyed in 1916 by a fire. The Remembrance Structure is similar to small cabins where enslaved people lived.

During the program, Harpole will talk about the 18th century techniques used to build the structure, which was made possible by a grant from the Roller-Bottimore Foundation of Richmond.

The week following the dedication of the Remembrance Structure, at 2 p.m. on June 8, will be the presentation of “From Colony to Country,” a story about local events during the summer of 1775 — the beginning of the American Revolution.

The drama will be shown on the grounds of the Rosewell Ruin; it is also scheduled for July 27 at the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown and on Aug. 17 at the Gloucester County Courthouse.

As part of Virginia’s 250 celebration, the drama is supported by a grant to the Fairfield Foundation by the VA250 Commission in partnership with Virginia Humanities.

The drama, produced by Shades of our Past, a Williamsburg-based provider of historical entertainment and educational programs, features John Page of Rosewell as a member of the Governor’s Council in 1775. Page served on Virginia’s Committee of Safety that was formed as the interim government when Royal Gov. John Murray, Lord Dunmore, left Williamsburg, but remained on ships on the coast.

After the production, the cast and Fairfield’s co-directors David Brown and Harpole will be on hand to answer questions.

Rosewell, located at 5113 Old Rosewell Lane in Gloucester, will be open free of charge from 12-4 p.m. on June 8. Visitors are encouraged to arrive before the drama; there will be food trucks, games and exhibits.

The June 8 production is part of a \$1 million fundraising initiative to stabilize the Rosewell Ruin as a backdrop for archaeology and historic preservation educational programs. For more on Fairfield Foundation events, visit fairfieldfoundation.org/events.