



The Pocahontas Mural tells the story of Pocahontas and how she was able to transcend two worlds: the English and the Powhatan nations. The artist shows the two cultures, treating them both with equal respect and importance. The artist, Michael Kirby, did extensive historical research to portray as accurately as possible the lives of the Indians and the settlers. The mural shows different ways they built their cities, the way they used transportation, how they used the rivers, their forms of canoes or ships, as well as their different beliefs of religion as well as showing the landscape. One scene is of London, while the other scene is of Werowocomoco; both highlight other elements such as their dress. Pocahontas is visible in both the English world and in the Powhatan world, wearing the appropriate clothing of each.

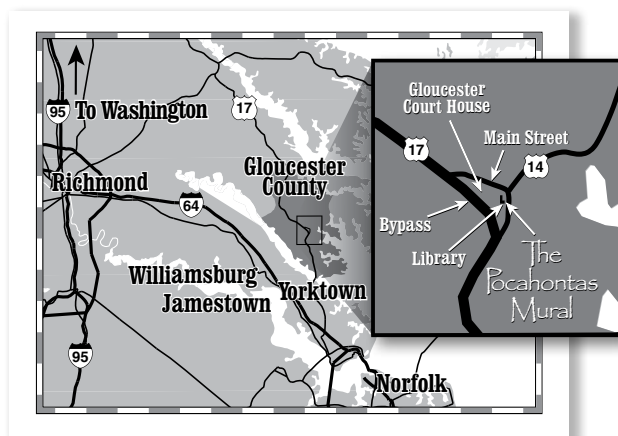


The mural was commissioned by the Cook Foundation in 2006. The Foundation wanted to honor Gloucester's rich history and place in the colonial heritage of our nation for the 400th anniversary of Jamestown in 2007. The Cook Foundation Board chose muralist Michael Kirby of Maryland to design and execute a mural commemorating the Life and Legend of Pocahontas, our native Virginia Princess. Kirby has trained in Florence, Italy and has experience painting worldwide. The mural was funded by the Cook Foundation and the Main Street Preservation Trust.

The glorious, panoramic mural on the side of the Main Street Library in historic Gloucester Court House achieves several goals. It honors Powhatan, Pocahontas, and the people who first resided in this land. The mural details the coming of the English and the establishment of the Jamestown colony. Lastly, the mural represents the union of North American and European cultures. In addition to these lofty and ponderous concerns, the mural also presents, through playful representation of animals and plants, the delightful landscape that is Virginia.

Perhaps grandest of all is the presentation of public art. To excite the eye, to engage the mind, and to encourage pride in the historical heritage of this community have been the goals of the Cook Foundation, the philanthropic organization which initiated the creation of this work of art.

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The Pocahontas Mural



Gloucester Court House,
Virginia

The Pocahontas mural contains many images and symbols. The mural essentially consists of two halves and is best approached by studying it from left to right.



The left side of the mural presents a moonlight view of the Powhatan world while the far right begins its story half a world away where the sun is shining in England. On the far left stands the large and imposing figure of Chief Powhatan; behind him is a temple. Powhatan is looking to the side, observing this whole scene. On the opposite side, in front of a white temple stands the white statue of King James I. The two leaders seem almost to be facing each other across a vast expanse of both distance and culture.

Powhatan is dressed in a mantle decorated by circular intricacies; the design for this mantle is based on Powhatan's actual mantle now held by the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England. The figure of Powhatan displays tattoos, copper ornaments, and a turkey feather crown. Each of these embellishments was worn only by the highest ranking Native American chieftains. The temple behind the Indian chief is a structure typical of the Powhatan Indians. This temple allows an interior view, revealing another smaller temple inside. This smaller structure was used to honor dead chieftains.

To the right of Powhatan is the child Pocahontas. She stands in a tree, almost blending into it, a position symbolic of her attachment to nature. The next scene to the right is Werowocomoco under the light of the moon. In this scene, the adolescent Pocahontas receives clothing and tattoos in anticipation of becoming a priestess of the Powhatans. The next image is of canoes in the York River, docking in front of Werowocomoco. The next important vista is the "medallion scene," lit by both moonlight and sunlight as people and

cultures on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean come together. Pocahontas appears to protect Captain John Smith while, at the same time, she reaches toward Europe. John Smith welcomes Pocahontas's protection, even as he reaches toward the Native American society. To the left and behind these two stands Powhatan, his hand raised in the air to stop the beating. Three warriors, then, are frozen by Pocahontas's courage and by Powhatan's command and do not injure Smith.

Further to the right appear the colonists' ships and the Jamestown Colony itself. It is to this settlement that Pocahontas will be taken after having been kidnapped by the English. Here Pocahontas meets John Rolfe. They eventually wed, and into that marriage the infant Thomas Rolfe is born. The next image to the right is the triple portrait of Rolfe, Pocahontas, and Thomas. As Rolfe embraces his wife and she, in turn, embraces their baby, this scene powerfully represents the union of the two cultures.

To the right of the triple portrait, the Atlantic Ocean spreads across the globe, eventually leading to London, where Rolfe, Pocahontas, and baby Thomas had moved. Clearly visible here are Westminster Abbey, London Bridge, the Tower of London, and the Globe Theatre. Next appears Pocahontas dressed in the fine clothing of the British upper class. The English welcome the exotic Pocahontas, renaming her Lady Rebecca.

The final image on the far right of the panorama is that of King James I, sculpted in white marble and framed in the architecture of the period.

In addition to the thrilling sweep of history captured in this mural, there are other interesting features depicted on this wall. Flora, fauna, animals, and references to folk lore abound.

Beneath this panoramic homage to Pocahontas appear a series of predellas. These eight predellas (or domed panels) seem to have been carved from stones native to the region. The predellas, taken together, tell the story of the Powhatan culture in Gloucester, Virginia. The first predella on the left, depicting red slate, represents the ancestors of the Powhatan people arriving at Werowocomoco. The second predella, of copper, tells a mythological creation story: The Great Hare populates the world and releases the three sisters who introduce corn, squash, and beans to the Powhatans. The third predella seems carved from oyster and clam shells and depicts the importance of corn to the culture. The fourth predella, marble, shows the Powhatan development of villages and longhouses. The fifth predella is of a hard, green stone used by the Powhatans to make weapons, especially axes. This scene presents conquering Powhatans with bows, axes, and clubs. The sixth predella is of opal. In this beautiful stone, Powhatan receives tribute and honor at Werowocomoco. The seventh predella, pyrite or fools' gold, shows the English coming to the New World in search of gold, only to find something far different. The final predella is rose quartz and reveals the scene of the burning of longhouses and the abandonment of Werowocomoco.