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**House of Burgesses – Part I**

**Lead: On July 30, 1619, the Virginia Assembly first met in Jamestown. It was the first legislative assembly in America and in one form or another it has been meeting ever since.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: By the end of 1619, the young Jamestown colony had over one thousand settlers, even though only about one in five survived the colonial experience in the early years. By the end of 1619, both African**

**slaves and women had arrived helping to bring stability to the fledgling colony.**

**The surviving settlers endured great hardships, including crop failure, starvation, blistering heat, lack of fresh water, fire, and sometimes hostile Native Americans. On top of that the shareholders of the Virginia Company of London, the owners of the colonial, were disappointed that it had not been more profitable. In 1619 they made changes in an effort to turn things around and believing that a more stable and profitable enterprise would help attract “new recruits.” They initiated a series of reforms: the institution of English Common Law**

**instead of martial law by the governor, the encouragement of private investors in the colony, who could own their own land and plantations rather than just working for the company, and the formation of an elected assembly, modeled after English Parliament, that would meet once a year.**

**Acting on the instructions of the home office, Governor George Yeardley took the first steps toward changing the status of the colonists to that of rightful English subjects. In June of 1619, the governor facilitated the election of burgesses, or citizen representatives, from the eleven Virginia boroughs along the James River. Two were elected from each**

**settlement, making a total of twenty-two. The following month they would participate in the first legislative assembly in the New World, thereby planting the seed of democratic self-government in North America. Next time: The politics of heat, tobacco, and malaria. Research assistance by Ann H. Johnson.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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**“A History of Jamestown, Virginia,” History Net  
<http://historian.org/local/jamstwnva.htm>**

**“The House of Burgesses,”  
<http://www.beyondbooks.com/ush72/2f.asp>.**

**Jamestown Historic Briefs, “The First Legislative Assembly at Jamestown, Virginia”  
<http://www.nps.gov/colo/Jthanout/1stASSLY.html>**

**Jamestown Historic Briefs, “Members of Jamestown’s First Representative Assembly”**

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**Jamestown Historic Briefs, “The Virginia Company of London: Success or Failure?”**

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