



VIRGINIA GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

Bill Barker, left, appears as Thomas Jefferson alongside Ron Carnegle's George Washington on Inauguration Day earlier this year. He will portray Jefferson during "Drinking History" this Friday.

Explore beer's role in the New World

Colonial Williamsburg presentation focuses on Jefferson, drinking during the Colonial era

BY SETH BIRKENMEYER
sbirkenmeyer@vagazette.com

Colonial Williamsburg is hoping to make history a little tastier with a presentation featuring Thomas Jefferson and ginger beer.

"That's going to capture people's imaginations," said Georgia Dunn, owner of the British West Indies Trading Company and the event's presenter. Character historian Bill Barker will portray Jefferson alongside her.

"There's so much content," Dunn said. She is a direct descendant of Thomas Harriott, the first recorded British explorer to make beer in the New World.

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation approached Dunn about speaking because of her ties to history.

"He was really a Renaissance

man," she said of her ancestor, whose other accomplishments include understanding native languages and corresponding with Galileo.

The presentation will cover the little-known history of ginger beer in early America, including its use as a clean method of ingesting water when water-borne illnesses were a common source of ailments. As such, Jefferson drank the antimicrobial beverage at almost every meal.

"That's a story that's never been told before," Dunn said, and she hopes to tell it in a way that meets the "world-class standard" of Colonial Williamsburg.

She enlisted the help of Dr. Frederick Smith, an associate professor of anthropology at the College of William and Mary, in fact checking for the event.

"When you're at Colonial

Want to go?

"Drinking History: Jefferson and Ginger Beer" kicks off at 7:30 p.m. Friday at the Kimball Theatre. Tastings begin at 6:30 p.m. Must be 21 or older to attend. Tickets are \$7 and available at bit.ly/2rjRYHu or by calling 229-1000.

Williamsburg, you don't play loose with the facts," Dunn said. "Words are very powerful."

Dunn's company continues to make and distribute ginger beer, and she will offer tastings prior to the presentations.

"People who fermented and made alcohol were the doctors of their time," she said. While it doesn't hold the same medicinal benefits that it once did, it might yet be just what the doctor ordered.

Birkenmeyer can be reached by phone at 757-790-3029.