

Virginia's New Government

1. As Jamestown grew, its system of government evolved. In 1619, King James sent a message from England to the colony of Virginia. He said in his message that the colonists could now begin to make their own laws. Before this day, all of the laws for Virginia had come from England!

2. When this message arrived, the governor of the colony of Virginia called for a meeting of the Virginia Assembly to take place in Jamestown. The Virginia Assembly was made up of the governor and two groups of men:

Group #1: The Governor's Council – These were very wealthy and powerful men who gave advice to the governor.

Group #2: Burgesses – These were citizen representatives from each of the 11 settlements in the colony of Virginia. Each settlement had two burgesses. These men were chosen by the freemen, or adult men, in Virginia who were allowed to vote. At that time, only free, adult men were considered to be citizens.

3. This important meeting was the beginning of government by the people in the New World. This was exciting because the people in Virginia were used to a king telling them what laws they had to follow. By 1640, the group of men called burgesses began to be called the Virginia House of Burgesses. The Virginia House of Burgesses was the first legislative (law-making) body in the New World to be elected by the people. This was a brand-new kind of government because the people now had the power to control their own government for the first time!

4. Eventually the Virginia House of Burgesses became known as the General Assembly of Virginia. The General Assembly is still our legislative (law-making).