

A Piece of the Past Hitches a Ride on Next Space Shuttle Mission

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A small piece of early American history will become the latest space traveler with the liftoff of NASA's space shuttle Atlantis. Atlantis is scheduled to launch Friday, June 8 at 7:38 p.m. EDT for the STS-117 mission to the International Space Station.

A nearly 400-year-old metal cargo tag bearing the words "Yames Towne" and some commemorative mementoes are packed in Atlantis' middeck floor cargo space for the roundtrip flight to the International Space Station. Their hitchhike through the galaxy honors this year's 400th anniversary of Jamestown, Va., the first permanent English settlement in North America.

"We found the tag at the bottom of a well during a dig at the James Fort," said William M. Kelso, director of archaeology at Historic Jamestowne for the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. "It appears to be a discarded shipping tag from a crate or trunk that arrived from England around 1611. The artifact clearly marks Jamestown as a destination - our nation's first address."

NASA has teamed with Jamestown 2007 to promote the spirit of exploration then, now and in the future. The artifacts' out-of-this-world trip is just one of a number of events held during the last 18 months that have commemorated the nation's pioneering spirit.

When the one-inch in diameter artifact lands back on Earth, it will have logged more than four million miles spanning four centuries. It will have

traveled from England to Jamestown, then to and from the space station. Two sets of Jamestown commemorative coins, authorized by Congress and issued by the U.S. Mint, also are on Atlantis.

The cargo tag and coin sets honoring Jamestown were handed over to NASA's Lesa Roe, director of the Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va., before they made their way aboard the shuttle. "NASA's proud to be entrusted with this piece of exploration history and to extend America's great sense of adventure, exploration and heritage into the future of space," she said when accepting the priceless artifact.

A \$5 gold piece and a silver dollar, both of which depict Jamestown symbols, make up each commemorative coin set. When returned from space, NASA will present one set to Virginia Governor Tim Kaine for display at Jamestown Settlement, a 17th century living history museum. The second set will be displayed at the National Park Service's Historic Jamestowne Visitor Center.

NASA will return the shipping tag to Historic Jamestowne where it will join hundreds of other artifacts in a new archaeological museum called the Archaearium. Since 1994, archaeologists at the Jamestown Rediscovery project have dug up more than a million items, including the long-lost remains of James Fort. For centuries, the fort was believed to have eroded into the James River.

Source: NASA

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