Pirates in Yorktown?

Pernel Taylor portrays a member of Blackbeard's Crew. Photo courtesy of York County.

Pirates plundered ships along the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean routes from the earliest days of New World settlement. William Berkeley, governor of the Virginia colony in 1660, wrote that the "Seas are soe full of Pyrates that it is almost impossible for any Ships to goe home [to England] in safety."

Privateers were private owners of vessels authorized by their government to attack enemy ships. During the 1600s, European powers were continually at war and privateers were used as an inexpensive means to avoid the costs of creating and maintaining a navy. After the 1713 Peace of Utrecht, many unemployed sailors turned to unlawful piracy, attacking and seizing ships regardless of their nationality.

The early part of the eighteenth century has been called the "Golden Age of Piracy" since pirates were a real threat to commerce and merchants' cargoes traveling in the Atlantic. Ships entering and leaving the busy port of York at this time had to constantly be alert for pirates on the high seas.

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