

Jamestown

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.



Jamestown was settled by the English in 1607 amid awesome difficulties. You are invited to share in the experiences of the early inhabitants through the written clues they left behind. There are contradictions and exaggerations in their accounts, for the colonists were much like ourselves; they perceived the same events in different ways.

Spain had reaped a harvest of gold in the New World. The Virginia Company adventurers had hoped to do the same, but they found a different kind of gold. The colonists survived and prospered because of two Indian agricultural products: maize kept them alive, and tobacco made them wealthy.

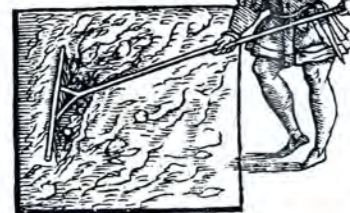
"They expect great retournes to pay the Companies' debt."—Sir Francis Wyatt

"Captaine Newport was dispatched with the tryals [samples] of pitch, tarre, glasse, frankincense and sope ashes, . . . and so returned for England."—1612

"1617, Captaine Hamar . . . found the market-place, and streets, and all other spare places planted with Tobacco."

—Virginia Company Records

By trade and conquest white men won, first, food for survival, then a continent. The native Americans got trinkets, tools, firearms, and firewater—the seeds of their dependency on the invader and the extinction of their way of life. The Indians' attempts to maintain their dignity were doomed from the first by the insatiable drive for wealth and property that motivated settlement.



"Three or four dayes were spent in feasting, dancing, and trading, wherin Powhatan carried himselve to proudly, yet discreetly . . . as made us all admire his natural gifts."—1608

"Capt. Newport, it is not agreable with my greatness in this pedling manner to trade for trifles."
—Powhatan

"At all times we so incountered them and curbed their insolencies."—1608

"It pleased God (in our extremity) to move the Indians to bring us corne, . . . when we rather expected that they would destroy us."
—John Smith, 1608

"What will it avaike you to take [by] force [that which] you may quietly have with love, or to destroy them that provide you with food?"
—Powhatan, 1612

"They are an enimie not suddenlie to be destroyed. We will constantlie pursue their extirpation."—Governor and Council, 1623

Despite abundant wild foods and game, rich soil, and the Indians' initial willingness to share their crops, hunger was commonplace in the early years—a specter easily transformed into starvation by a fire, rodents, spoilage, or mishaps at sea. Settlers, preoccupied with clearing, building, and exploring, neglected a basic necessity for survival: the cultivation of an adequate food supply.

"Though there be Fish in the Sea, Foules in the ayre, and Beasts in the woods, their bounds are so large, they so wilde, and we so weake and ignorant, we cannot much trouble them."—Smith, 1608



"Some to satisfye their hunger have robbed the store for which I caused them to be executed . . . Now famin begininge to Looke gastely and pale in every face, notheinge was spared to maintayne Lyfe."—Percy, 1610

"Savages . . . daily frequented us with what provisions they could get."

"An easie laborer will keepe and tend two acres of corne, and cure a good store of tobacco."—Rolfe, 1616

"The Colonie dispersed all about, planting tobacco . . ."—Virginia Company Records

Daily life for the settlers was difficult at best, if they survived at all. The Company used a variety of means to discipline the people in the attempt to keep them healthy, working, and reasonably content, with little success at first. Yet the colony lived, if most of its individual inhabitants did not.

"Our men were destroyed with cruell diseases . . . and by Warres, . . . but for the most part, they died of meere famine."—Percy, 1607

"More doe die in the disease of their minde than of their body."—George Thorp

"That a fitt hundreth might be sent of woemen, Maides young and uncorrupt to make wifes to the Inhabitants; . . . to make the men there more settled and lesse moveable."—Virginia Company,

[Take along] *"one or two preachers that God may be honored, the people instructed, mutinies better avoided, and obedience better used."*

—Richard Hakluyt

"A Dutch man-of-Warr arrived . . . [with] 20 and odd Negroes."—Rolfe, 1620



Problems of disorder, idleness, and intense political rivalries, among other difficulties, led to repeated "disgustfull brawles" during the early years. The colony's successful struggle to survive and prosper was closely related to the development of a workable government structure adapted to New World conditions while preserving the English political and legal tradition.

"Wingfield and Kendall . . . strengthened themselves with the sailers and other confederates, to regain their former credit and authority . . . Smith unexpectedly returning had the plot discovered to him. Much trouble he had to prevent it . . . These brawles are so disgustfull . . ."—Proceedings of the English Colony, 1607

"In detestation of idleness, be it enacted, that if any man be founde to live as an Idler or renegate, though a freeman, it shall be lawfull . . . to appoint him [to a master] to serve for wages."

—General Assembly, 1619

"We were and are still resolved to proceed unto the perfecting of that work wee have begunne . . . by a newe Charter to be made."—1624

"A Levye likewise . . . is raised for the building of a State house at James Cittie."—1639

"For having . . . raised unjust Taxes . . . For assuming the monopoly of the Beaver Trade . . . For having protected, favoured, and emboldened the Indians . . . Wee accuse Sir William Berkley, as guilty."—Nathaniel Bacon, Jr., 1676



The Jamestown Story

The founding of Jamestown, the first successful English settlement in America, grew out of the rising tides of nationalism and capitalism in the Western World. Spain and France had already established colonies in North America by 1607, but earlier English expeditions under Sir Walter Raleigh had failed. The "Adventurers", or shareholders, of the Virginia Company of London epitomized their own nation's determination to pursue the world's wealth through trade, conquest, and colonial settlement. The company secured a royal charter in 1606, recruited settlers, and outfitted three small ships under the command of Capt. Christopher Newport: The *Susan Constant*, 100 tons; the *Godspeed*, 40 tons; and the *Discovery*, 20 tons,—frail craft for an awesome undertaking.

"The fleet fell from London" on December 20, 1606, according to George Percy, a member of the party, with 144 men aboard. From the first, stormy weather and conflicts among the leaders plagued the expedition. The ships called in the West Indies and finally landed at Cape Henry on April 26, more than four months out of London. After preliminary explorations and an Indian encounter, 105 colonists stepped ashore at Jamestown on May 13, 1607, their vessels "so neere the shoare that they are moored to the trees."

By mid-June, a triangular fort had been constructed and a small grain crop planted. But life on land proved to be no smoother than the storm-tossed voyage had been. Food shortages, political quarrels, and disease took a heavy toll. One forceful leader arose in the early years, the young Capt. John Smith, who wisely insisted that planting, building, and discipline take precedence over prospecting for gold. Smith handled contacts with the native Americans peacefully, if sternly, but an

injury forced his return to England late in 1609. His departure was followed by a nightmare winter, known ever after as the "starving tyme" during which 90 percent of the colonists died.

Almost from the first, settlers other than Englishmen shared in the tribulations. Late in 1608, Capt. Newport brought in eight skilled Poles and Germans to manufacture glass, pitch, tar, and potash. Italian glassblowers and German sawmill operators followed.

Just in time to avert the abandonment of the colony by the survivors of the "starving tyme," a new governor, Lord Delaware, arrived with reinforcements and supplies. Soon martial law was established, more settlers were brought in, private use of land recognized, and the area of settlement expanded. John Rolfe began the cultivation of tobacco about 1612, and by 1619, a lucrative trade was well underway. Rolfe's marriage to Pocahontas, daughter of Indian Chief Powhatan and a friend to the white settlers, eased tensions between the races for a time.

Two ships with human cargo were dispatched to the colony in 1619. One vessel, from the West Indies, carried more than 20 blacks, the first to arrive in British North America. They were promptly sold as servants. Another ship sailed from England with 100 young women to be wives for the men. And in the same year, as a result of a new company charter, the first representative assembly in America convened at Jamestown. By arranging for family-oriented homesteads, for a source of servant-labor for the gentry, and for a representative governing body, the company ensured a permanent, relatively English society in a raw new land.

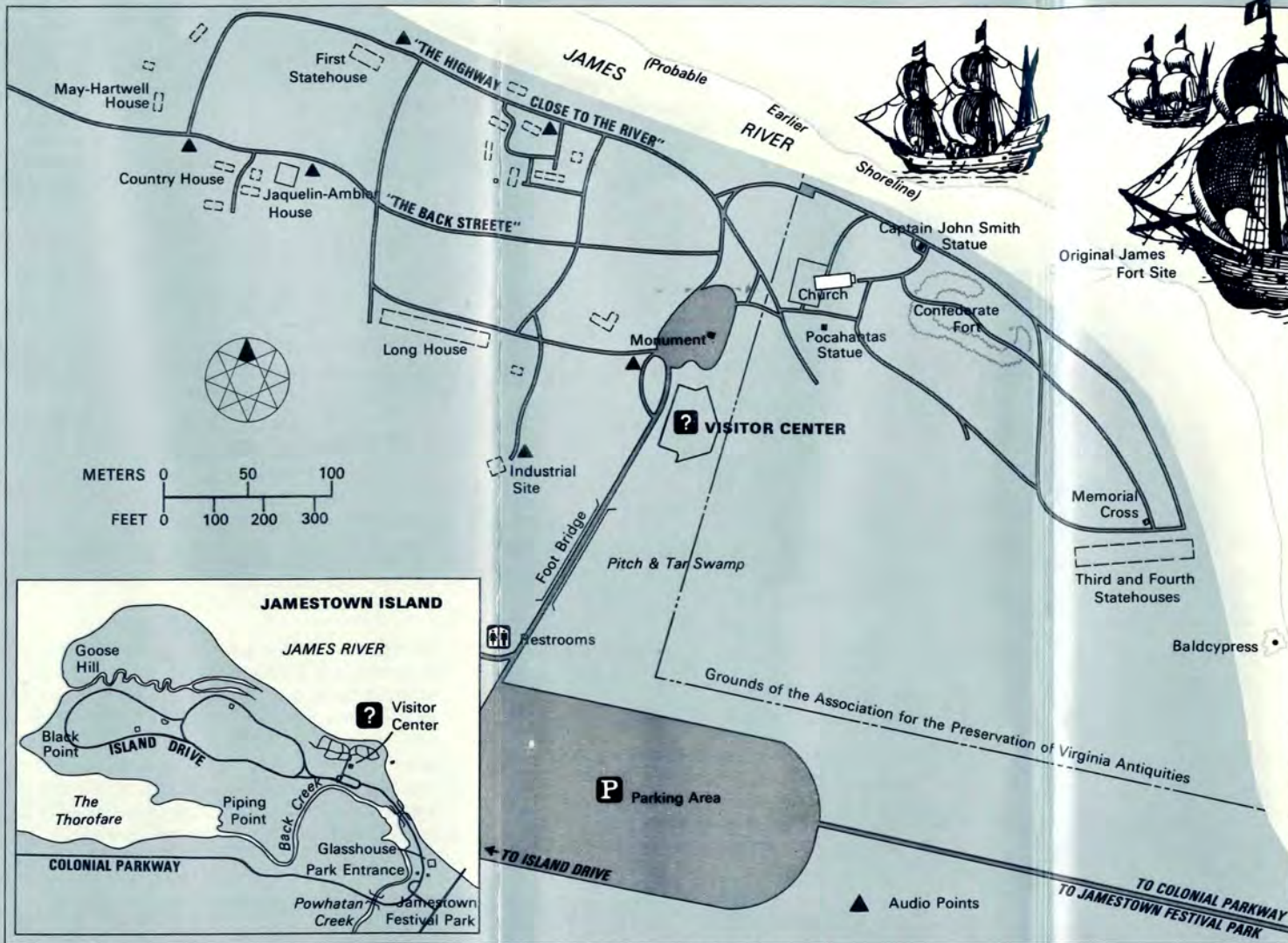
Relations between the native Americans and the white invaders had been strained for

years, when in 1622, after the death of Powhatan, a violent Indian uprising cost the lives of nearly one third of the colonists, triggering vicious retaliatory attacks. Following the massacre, King James I dissolved the Virginia Company and created a royal colony in 1624, after which Virginia grew steadily.

During the English Civil War, 1649-60, Gov. William Berkeley remained loyal to the crown even after the Cromwellians had seized power. In 1656, however, a British fleet sailed to Jamestown, ending the resistance. With Berkeley deposed, the Assembly elected a new governor.

Following the restoration of Charles II in 1660, Berkeley was again commissioned governor. A series of disasters, including "the most dreadful hurry cane that ever the colony groaned under," a precipitous decline in tobacco prices, and more frontier conflicts, fanned political discontent. In 1676 dissident frontiersmen rebelled under the leadership of Nathaniel Bacon, Jr. With strong popular support, Bacon won a commission as commander-in-chief of the anti-Indian forces from the governor. He persuaded the Assembly to pass what became known as "Bacon's laws," increasing local control over government. Next, learning that the governor was raising troops to use against him, Bacon took over Jamestown and burned it.

The town was rebuilt on the old ruins. But in 1698, the statehouse burned for the fourth time, and the next year the capital was moved to Middle Plantation and renamed Williamsburg. After that, Jamestown became a plantation, its public buildings and houses crumbling into decay. But the site has an enduring significance as the place where American history began.



The point at which the Jamestown settlers landed has since been obscured by the changing course of the James River. The site of the original fort is now under water also. The ancient baldcypress tree remaining in the river probably stood on the bank in the 17th century.

Jamestown Today

From the Jamestown visitor center, paths lead throughout "James Cittie." Explore them at your own pace in any direction. Only one original structure remains, yet many visible clues suggest a fascinating story of growth, death, decay, and rebirth. Try to imagine how the colonists felt when they landed on this isolated shore, at the mercy of frightening unknowns.

You may further explore the island on the Loop Drive. As you leave the park, visit the reconstructed **Glasshouse**. Just outside the entrance station is Jamestown **Festival Park**, where replicas of the first fort, an Indian house, and the ships may be seen.

There are lodging and eating facilities at Williamsburg and Yorktown, and a cafeteria at the Festival Park. Private campgrounds are nearby. There are picnic areas along the Colonial Parkway, but no service stations.

For your safety, please keep on the paths and watch your children. Stay off the ruins and away from the river, which is deep here.

Administration

In 1893 the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities acquired 9.3 hectares (23 acres) on Jamestown Island. The remainder of the 600-hectare (1500-acre) island became a part of Colonial National Historical Park in 1934. Jamestown has been jointly administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, and the APVA since 1940. Inquiries should be directed to the superintendent, Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, VA 23690.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior