

## THE JAMESTOWN STORY

People have lived in the Historic Triangle of Virginia for at least 10,000 years, and it is certain that the Spanish tried and failed to establish a Jesuit mission in the area in 1570.

In 1607, settlers and seamen came ashore on Jamestown Island to establish the first permanent English settlement in the New World. They had arrived on the ships *Susan Constant*, *Godspeed*, and *Discovery* after a voyage from London that set out December 20, 1606. The ships sailed into Chesapeake Bay on April 26 and landed their people at Jamestown Island May 14, 1607. The settlers' purpose was to make a profit for themselves and the Virginia Company of London, and fortunes had been promised.

Promoters told the English settlers that the Virginia colony was “a paradise inhabited by simple, friendly people.” And historian Warren M. Billings has observed, “The eager colonists landed expecting to subdue this land of plenty to their dominion and to profit handsomely from its uses.”

Death was easier to find than fortune. When the next group of English settlers arrived in January 1608, only 38 or 40 of the original 104 men and boys were still alive. Jamestown was a mosquito-ridden swamp. Powhatan's Indians sometimes traded with the settlers, sometimes attacked them. Settlers and sailors did build a three-sided wooden fort but seemed more interested in hunting for gold than planting crops. Famine killed some.

Captain John Smith issued the order “he that will not work, shall not eat,” but Smith, injured, left in 1609, and the winter of 1609-10 became known as the “starving time,” when a few settlers ate their dead. When Lieutenant Governor Thomas Gates arrived with other shiploads of colonists that May, famine, disease and Indian attacks had reduced the 250 or so settlers to about 60, who were so disheartened, they abandoned the fort and sailed a month later.

Only the arrival of Governor Thomas West with 150 recruits and well-stocked supply ships got the settlers back to the fort and kept Jamestown alive.

One period of peace came after 1614 when the Powhatan Indian, Pocahontas, married John Rolfe, a settler who had created a profitable crop in Virginia tobacco. Tobacco was shipped to England in 1614 and guaranteed the financial success of Jamestown. Colonists arrived by the thousands in Virginia.

Three things changed Virginia in 1619. The governor began to parcel out the first privately owned land in the colony. Then, the first representative legislative assembly in the New World met in Jamestown's church from July 30 to August 4.

At the end of August, a Dutch ship, the *White Lion*, a privateer working with an English partner, traded “20, and odd Negroes” for food.

The first Africans may have been treated as indentured servants, but chattel racial slavery evolved before 1650. The first laws about slavery were passed in the 1660s, and a complete “slave code” was enacted in 1705.

By that time, Jamestown was no longer capital of Virginia. Its statehouse had burned in 1698, and the capital was moved to Williamsburg.

Two other events of note: In 1620, the Virginia Company sent 90 unmarried women to Virginia and raised money to send another 57 young women and widows the next year. The timing was terrible; it put the women here for the Indian uprising of 1622. The expanding English settlements threatened traditional Indian culture and lands. An uprising led by Opechancanough against English settlements along the James killed one-quarter of Virginia's European's and damaged crops and livestock. As many or more colonists died of famine or disease the following year.