

VIRGINIA SETTLEMENT, 1607-1624

I. The Virginia Company of London

A. In 1606, the Virginia Company – divided into the Virginia Company of London, and the Virginia Company of Plymouth – received a charter from King James I (r. 1603-1629) for settlement and trade in the New World (See Hawke, *The Colonial Experience*, page 87 for more details on the companies).

B. The Virginia Company of London would settle at Jamestown, Virginia.

C. The London Company members, or “adventurers,” furnished the capital, the settlers, and had charge of trade and profits.

D. In England a royal council, its members chosen by the crown, controlled “all matters that shall or may concern the government” in Virginia. IN THEORY THE CROWN GOVERNED THE COLONIES AND HELD ALL POLITICAL POWER, IN PRACTICE, THE ROYAL COUNCIL WAS COMPOSED MAINLY OF COMPANY LEADERS, AND THUS IN EFFECT THE COMPANIES RAN THEIR OWN SHOWS IN THE CROWNS NAME.

E. This royal council was to choose and instruct a subsidiary council in Virginia.

F. Supreme authority overseas rested with the subsidiary council.

1. The Council represented the company in economic matters
2. The Council represented the crown in political matters
3. The Council’s regulations had the force of law, but the charter guaranteed Englishmen overseas all “liberties, franchises, and immunities” of Englishmen at home

G. The London company officers decided that the first contingent would set up a base and report back what the pattern of settlement should be. The company would build up the base by feeding in new batches of settlers and supplies.

II. Jamestown

A. 20 December 1606, three ships, the Susan Constant, the Godspeed, and Discovery, sailed from England for Virginia with 144 colonists.

B. 24 May 1607, the ships reached the James River and settled Jamestown with 105 settlers. All colonists were men.

C. Barbaric early settlement 1607-09: Council government

1. The settlers had chosen the spit of land jutting into the James River because it was on a large river that gave access to the backcountry and thus native trade, and because it was sufficiently inland to avoid surprise attack from the high seas.

2. The problem was that the site was low, swampy, and filled with mosquitoes.
3. Quickly, a council of seven took control of the colony (by Company order) and the settlers divided into three groups: one to build a fort and housing within it; another to clear the ground for planting and to erect a warning outpost on the seacoast, and a third to explore the river for a passage east.
4. Despite planning, the settlers hope for surviving the first winter seemed poor. They had eaten deeply into their provisions. Although they planted orange trees, cotton, potatoes, and melons – all experimental crops – they failed to plant grain.
5. The summer of 1607 was hot, and malaria swept through the mosquito-infested fort.
6. In addition, the colonists relations with the Indians of the area deteriorated quickly.
 - a. In 1607, the chieftain Powhatan dominated the native peoples living in the James River area.
 - b. He had asserted supremacy over and brought together a few dozen small tribes in the Powhatan Confederacy.
 - c. Powhatan at first may have considered the English potential allies in his struggle to extend his power further over his Indian rivals, and he tried to work with them.
 - d. However, relations between the Indians and the English turned tense, especially as the starving colonists took to raiding Indian food supplies.
 - e. The Indians responded with violence.
7. By mid-September 1607, 46 of the original 105 had died of malaria or starvation.
8. When Captain Newport returned in January 1608 with 120 new settlers, he found only 38 of the original 105 alive.
9. To make matters worse, five days after Newport docked, the fort and all but three houses were destroyed by fire, along with the provisions and ammunition. It was the coldest part of the year, and the group seemed doomed.
10. John Smith then emerged and led the colony between 1608 and 1609.
 - a. He had been in the original group of 1607, but had been locked up on the ship for mutinous talk, had left the colony when he was voted off the Council at the time of first settlement, and had made a map of Virginia. Smith was also the man who had been “saved” by Pocahontas from the ceremonial wrath of her father Powhatan.
 - b. He forcefully led the colony. “Those who do not work, do not eat.”
 - c. Banishment for those who do not help produce for the livelihood of the colony.
11. When Newport arrived a little later, with supplies and 70 more settlers, Smith had gotten the colonists to repair the buildings, sow seed, and they had started raising livestock, chickens, and swine.
12. Circumstances deteriorated, however, when Smith returned to England in 1609 for a gunpowder burn.

| Date | Population |
|------------------|---|
| May 1607 | 105, first landing |
| October 1608 | 200, from new arrivals |
| Summer 1609 | 131, death from disease |
| August 1609 | 381, from new arrivals |
| October 1609 | 280, death from Indian attack |
| May 1610 | 90, "starving time" |
| June 1610 | 375, from new arrivals |
| December 1610 | 250, death from disease and Indian war |
| Late March 1611 | 152, departures, death from Indian attack |
| Early May 1611 | 482, from new arrivals |
| August 1611 | 752, from new arrivals |
| December 1611 | 600, death from Indian attacks |
| May 1615 | 400 |
| 1619 | 700, approximate |
| 1619-1622 | Sandys sends out 3,570 settlers |
| 1622 <Indian war | 1,240 |
| 1624 | 1,292 (244 women including children) |
| 1629 | 2,600 |
| 1632 | 3,200 |
| 1634 | 5,200 |
| 1644 | 8,000 |

III. Reorganization, 1609-1618: Governor, Starving Times, and Laws Divine, Moral, and Martial

A. Based on the example of Smith, the company swept the local Council and its president aside to make room for a **governor**, with full power and authority to direct the colony. He was to have authority for life and to control military and civil affairs. He could form a council for advice, but he did not have to take the advice.

B. In June 1609, a nationwide attempt to get settlers proved successful. 600 men, women, and children left for Virginia. Of the nine ships that set out, one went down at sea and one wrecked off Bermuda. The others ships, with 400 settlers, made it to Virginia, but found nothing to be happy about.

1. Only 100 people were alive.
2. No food had been planted for the newcomers.
3. No houses prepared.
4. There was political chaos as well.

D. Starving time: winter 1609-10

1. After these new arrivals came in 1609, many died from disease – malaria. There was no food to eat, those weak from the journey could not plant, and what food there was would not go around. The colonists were reduced to eating dogs, cats, rats, and mice. Cannibalism also occurred.

2. Of the near six hundred settlers who managed to make it to Virginia by 1609, only 90 survived the winter of 1609-1610.

E. In an attempt to solve the problem of starvation, in May 1611, Thomas Dale set up a new legal system called the “Dale laws,” or **The Laws Divine, Moral, and Martial**. Virginians were ruled by a military standard under which all would be forced to work.

F. However, the situation did not improve because the settlers were engaged in the **First Anglo-Powhatan War** (1610-1614). This war had started in 1610 when Governor Lord De La Warr arrived in Virginia carrying war orders from the Virginia Company.

1. Virginians raided Indian villages, burned houses, confiscated provisions, and torched cornfields.

2. A peace settlement ended this First Anglo-Powhatan War in 1614, sealed by the marriage of Pocahontas to the colonist John Rolfe.

G. Although the Indian War was over, the colonists had not improved their situation. By 1616, when Dale returned to England, there were only 351 people living in Virginia, they had no cash crop, and the company still had no profits.

IV. Explanations for the Jamestown Fiasco (1607-1618)

A. Too many gentlemen and skilled laborers in the first groups of settlers

1. Virginia, as a patriotic enterprise, had excited the imagination of England’s nobility and gentry. The shareholders included 32 present or future earls, 4 countesses, and 3 viscounts (all members of the nobility) as well as hundreds of lesser gentlemen, some of them perhaps retainers of the larger men. Not all were content to risk only their money. Of the 105 original settlers who started the colony, 36 could be classified as genteel. In the first “supply” of 120 additional settlers, 28 were gentlemen, and in the second supply of 70, again 28 were gentlemen. These numbers gave Virginia’s population about six times as large a proportion of gentlemen as England had”(Edmund Morgan, “Jamestown Fiasco” from *American Slavery, American Freedom*.)

2. “Gentlemen, by definition, had no manual skill, nor could they be expected to work at ordinary labor. They were supposed to be useful for “the force of knowledge, the exercise of counsel”; but to have ninety-odd wise men offering advice while a couple of hundred did the work was inauspicious.” (Edmund Morgan, “Jamestown Fiasco” from *American Slavery, American Freedom*.)

3. Also problematic was the number of skilled workers going to Virginia. “Among the skilled men who started the settlement in 1607 were four carpenters, two bricklayers, one mason (apparently a higher skill than bricklaying), a blacksmith, a tailor, and a barber. The first “supply” in 1608 had six tailors, two goldsmiths, two refiners, two apothecaries, a blacksmith, a gunner, a cooper, a tobacco pipe maker, a jeweler, and a perfumer.” (Edmund Morgan, “Jamestown Fiasco” from *American Slavery, American Freedom*.)

4. “[B]eing skilled they expected to be paid and fed for doing the kind of work for which they had been hired. Some were obviously useful. But others may have found themselves without means to use their special talents. If they were conscientious, the jeweler may have spent time looking for jewels, the goldsmiths for gold, the perfumer for something to make perfume with.

But when the search proved futile, it did not follow that they should or would exercise their skilled hands at any other tasks. It was not suitable for a perfumer or a jeweler or a goldsmith to put his hand to the hoe. Rather they could join the gentlemen in genteel loafing while a handful of ordinary laborers worked at the ordinary labor of growing and gathering food. What was worse, many gentlemen refused to do agricultural work at all, and the craftsmen who came refused to do work they were not trained for.” (Edmund Morgan, “Jamestown Fiasco” from *American Slavery, American Freedom*.)

5. So, planting was done by few for many. Often it was delayed and delayed, or not done at all. The people of the first settlement often relied on the Indians of the area for food.

B. Although we may understand why the colonists did not want to work, why would they fight with the Indians who had supplied them with food early on during settlement. The real reason for the fiasco was the **Self-conception of the colonists**

1. To have grown enough corn to feed the colony would have required only a small amount of work, yet food was not grown. “Even in their free time men shunned the simple planting tasks that sufficed for the Indians. And the very fact that the Indians did grow corn may be one more reason why the colonists did not. For the Indians presented a challenge that Englishmen were not prepared to meet, a challenge to their image of themselves, to their self-esteem, to their conviction of their own superiority over foreigners, and especially over barbarous foreigners like the Irish and the Indians” (Morgan, Jamestown Fiasco).

2. “If you were a colonist, you knew that your technology was superior to the Indians'. You knew that you were civilized, and they were savages. It was evident in your firearms, your clothing, your housing, your government, your religion. The Indians were supposed to be overcome with admiration and to join you in extracting riches from the country. But your superior technology had proved insufficient to extract anything. The Indians, keeping to themselves, laughed at your superior methods and lived from the land more abundantly and with less labor than you did. They even furnished you with the food that you somehow did not get around to growing enough of yourselves. To be thus condescended to by heathen savages was intolerable. And when your own people started deserting in order to live with them, it was too much. If it came to that, the whole enterprise of Virginia would be over. So you killed the Indians, tortured them, burned their villages, burned their cornfields. It proved your superiority in spite of your failures. And you gave similar treatment to any of your own people who succumbed to the savage way of life. But you still did not grow much corn. That was not what you had come to Virginia for”(Morgan, Jamestown Fiasco).

V. Reorganization of 1618: The Company encourages prospective settlers with incentives (Headright system, House of Burgesses)

A. In 1618, the Virginia Company sent instructions to Virginia for a new form of government.

1. The role of the absolute governor was abandoned, and the settlers were now to be governed by the “free laws which his Majesty’s subjects live under in England.”

2. All Ancient settlers, pre-1616, would get 100 acres

3. All people coming over at company expense would work for seven years and then be free to go on their own [Indentured servants]

4. All people paying their own way would get a “headright” of 50 acres, and additional grants for every person whose way they paid

B. The Creation of the House of Burgesses

1. With the new charter of 1618, the company authorized the creation of a legislative body, the House of Burgesses.
2. It had been created to stop the settlers who were complaining about military rule and not having a voice in the system
3. Those Virginians who owned 50 acres of land or more at each settlement could elect 2 of their own to meet with the Governor and the Council.
4. July 30, 1619, the first assembly met, with the Governor and his council seated in the choir area of the Jamestown church, and the 22 Burgesses meeting in the body of the church.
5. The House of Burgesses had limited authority. All their laws must be approved by the governor and his council, and then must be sent to London to receive the approval of the London Company
6. This was the first Legislative body to meet in the new world
7. With the Governor, Council, and Burgesses, we see a bicameral legislature and executive
 - a) Lower house=Burgesses
 - b) Upper house=Council
 - c) Executive=Governor
8. The Burgesses and Governor’s Council agreed in 1624 that the governor should have no power to levy taxes without the consent of the House of Burgesses and Council.

VI. The End of Company Power

A. Although the changes of 1618 did excite more interest in Virginia, two events caused the end of company power.

1. The Introduction of tobacco
 - a) First introduced by John Rolfe in 1612.
 - b) Could provide great wealth very quickly
 - c) boom lasted from 1620 to 1630, when tobacco was worth around 3 shillings a pound.
 - d) tobacco was the only thing planters would grow – no other crop could make so much.
 - e) Tobacco was planted in the streets
 - f) Tobacco became the principle medium of exchange in Virginia
2. Led quickly to a boom town atmosphere
 - a) There was no gold or silver in Virginia. A man could not make a fortune by himself. But if he could stay alive and somehow get control of a few servants and keep them alive, he could make more in a year than he was likely to make in several in England. And if he could get a large number of servants, he might indeed make a fortune.

b) In boom country those who make gold for tobacco spend it quickly for drink, women, and sometimes for food and clothing.

c) Men come to boom country not to settle down, but to strike it rich and get out.

d) Few men had wives – women were very scarce – and so they drank for comfort. This was a simple stopping place. Settle down with a wife later.

1] 1619 company sent 90 women – men could purchase a bride for 120 pounds of tobacco

2] 1621 fifty-seven women sent – price up to 150 pounds of tobacco

e) The ships that came into Virginia's harbors in the 1620s were moving taverns. Their captains sold alcohol at very high prices – paid in tobacco – and sold the tobacco for their own gain.

f) In this society without women and with lots of liquor and guns, violence was widespread.

1] against servants who were increasingly seen as chattel. They were nothing other than machines to make tobacco. They had no options and were forced to work. They are violent themselves.

2] against Indians. To plant tobacco – a crop that destroys the soil – planters want more and more land. Move out on frontier and Indian fighting results.

B. The Indian Attack of 1622

1. A fragile eight year peace followed the First Anglo-Powhatan that ended in 1614.

2. But the Indians, pressed by the land-hungry whites and ravaged by European diseases, struck back in 1622.

3. In 1622, a series of Indian attacks left 347 settlers dead, including John Rolfe.

4. In response the Virginia Company issued new orders calling for "a perpetual war without peace or truce," one that would prevent the Indians "from being any longer a people."

C. Although the company was trying to deal with the Indians, it was too late, King James I was ready to act against the company.

D. When he prepared to act in 1624, there were only 1,300 people living in Virginia of 8,500 settlers who had moved there since 1607.

E. So, we see that the company had made little progress in the first 10 years, except for survival and the development of tobacco.

F. Despite the new government, and the efforts to encourage more settlers to come to Virginia, the London Company never produced a profit.

G. In May 1624, James I revoked the London Company's charter because he believed, as it became obvious, that the company was bankrupt and could not control the colony. He royalized the colony.