

Jamestown 2-5

John Smith Struggles

By mid-December, the Virginia Company supply ships had not yet arrived. The Nansemonds who lived nearby, promised Jamestown 400 baskets of corn. When the corn failed to arrive, John Smith led soldiers into their village. The English fired their muskets, burned down one home, and threatened to destroy the entire village. This display of military force convinced the Nansemonds to give up half their winter food to Smith.

Word reached Powhatan of the incident between the English and the Nansemonds. He sent word to Jamestown that he wanted to trade corn for European goods. Smith and over forty soldiers traveled to Werowocomoco to make the trade.



Above: In 1608, Captain Christopher Newport attempted to crown Chief Powhatan in an attempt to make Powhatan a subject of the king of England. It failed. Powhatan refused to kneel for the crown and he made the English travel to him rather than go to Jamestown. Painting: John Gadsby Chapman. *The Coronation of Powhatan*. 1835. Public domain.

They arrived on 12 January 1609. Negotiations went poorly. Whether planned or not, Powhatan walked away from Smith and left the village just before the Natives grouped for an attack on the English. Smith and his men immediately took a defensive position and at the point of their muskets, forced the frightened villagers into giving up a large

supply of their corn. That night, Pocahontas secretly approached Smith and warned him of an impending attack on his men by her father. Then she disappeared into the night. For reasons unknown, the attack never came.

In August 1609, John Ratcliffe had returned to the colony intent on removing Smith from authority. Smith refused to step down from the presidency until the new governor Lord De La Warr arrived from England. With new settlers arriving, Smith led an expedition up the James River to bargain for more food from the Natives. While he slept on the boat, somehow the gunpowder he carried on his belt exploded. Smith had many enemies and this may have been more than an accident. Smith caught fire and some of his skin burned away. His injuries forced him to leave for England in October 1609.

The Starving Time

With John Smith away, Powhatan knew Jamestown was vulnerable. He cut off all trade with the colony and ordered attacks on any settlers who ventured too far from the fort. In one incident, John Ratcliffe had left the fort to trade for food with the Natives. Powhatan captured Ratcliffe and had him burned alive. President George Percy wrote: "Indians killed as fast without [the fort] as Famine and Pestilence did within."

A drought followed by a harsh winter in 1609-1610 destroyed food crops. To survive, settlers ate horses, dogs, rats, and insects; then they ate leather, bark, and roots. Finally, some resorted to cannibalism. One man killed his wife and tried to eat her—he was burned alive for the crime. Although no one charged others for digging up a dead Native and eating him. When two English supply ships *Deliverance* and *Patience* arrived in May 1610, they found only sixty people still alive inside Jamestown. This cruel winter became known as the Starving Time.

Colonists decided to abandon Jamestown for good but Lord De La Warr, the new governor of Virginia, finally arrived and demanded that Jamestown be rebuilt. De La Warr

organized people into groups and got them working, but half the settlers still died from disease. Citing ill health, De La Warr left for England after spending less than a year in Virginia.

Tobacco

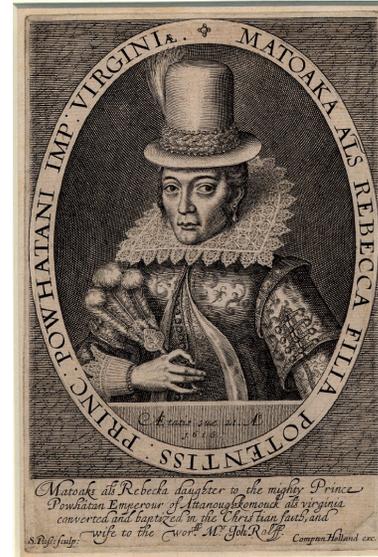
Before arriving at Jamestown, the supply ship *Sea Venture* had been damaged during a storm and forced to land on a reef near a Caribbean island. For the next nine months crew and passengers built two new ships: *Deliverance* and *Patience*. Passenger, farmer, and recent widower John Rolfe, somehow managed to obtain some tobacco seeds while on the island. After arriving in Jamestown in 1610, Rolfe began growing this milder strain of tobacco that was already popular in England. Suddenly, Jamestown became profitable, not with gold but with tobacco.

Everyone started growing tobacco wherever they could. In fact, officials passed laws forcing colonists to also plant corn so that people had enough to eat. Tobacco practically became a currency. For 120 pounds of tobacco, a single man could purchase a would-be wife sent over from England.

Pocahontas

It was common for the English to kidnap Natives and convert them to Christianity. In 1613, Captain Samuel Argall schemed to kidnap Pocahontas in order to get food, English prisoners, and English weapons from Powhatan. Argall and his friend Native chief Japazaws convinced Pocahontas to dine on the ship *Treasurer*. After the meal, Pocahontas was held captive while Japazaws received a copper kettle for his part in the kidnapping. In response, Powhatan sent Jamestown corn and released his English prisoners, but he refused to give up his weapons.

The English authorities decided to convert Pocahontas to Christianity. Pocahontas learned the English ways quickly and willingly. In April 1614, she converted to Christianity under the name of Rebecca and married tobacco planter John Rolfe. The couple had a son, Thomas. The marriage brought eight years of



Left: Pocahontas as she appeared on her visit to England. Engraving: Simon de Passe. *Pocahontas*. 1616. National Portrait Gallery, London. Public domain.

peace between the English and Powhatans. To promote the Jamestown colony, the Rolfes traveled to England in 1616. Pocahontas became the center of attention—she even visited the court of King James I. Sadly, after nine months in England, Pocahontas contracted a lung disease—probably tuberculosis—and died on 21 March 1617. She

was buried in Gravesend churchyard but the exact burial site has been lost. Thomas also became sick and remained in England with Rolfe's brother. Thomas recovered and returned to Virginia several years later but never saw his father again. John Rolfe died in 1622 as a result of either an illness or from a massive Native attack on the English colonists in Virginia.

Virginia

The English continued to expand in Virginia due to increasing population and tobacco farming. Tobacco quickly used up the nutrients of the soil, so farmers constantly took more Native land to grow tobacco. In March 1622, the Natives staged an all out assault on multiple English settlements killing about 350 people. Warfare continued for several years with the English eventually destroying the power of the Powhatan Confederacy.

Between 1607 and 1625, half of the almost 9,000 settlers to Jamestown died. Disgusted with the incompetence of the Virginia Company, in 1624, King Charles I made Virginia a royal colony. The king appointed a royal governor to run the political affairs of Virginia in the king's name.