



# Our Nation

## Studies Weekly

### AMERICAN FOUNDATIONS

## Founding of Jamestown

In North America, Spanish settlements were in Florida. The Spanish wanted to stay close to the Caribbean, where they had colonies. The French claimed the north in Newfoundland, Canada. The French were establishing a strong fur trade with the Native Americans in the Canadian region. Neither the French nor the Spanish wanted the eastern coastline of America. The English gladly placed a claim.

The English government had sponsored many exploration expeditions to America. All land that was mapped and claimed by an English explorer was the property of the English monarch. No recognition was given to the Native Americans who already lived there. The monarch kept the land as a royal domain or granted it by charter (legal document) in large or small blocks to privileged companies or persons.

In 1607, the Virginia Company gained a charter for an area in America called Virginia. King James I signed the charter and gave permission for this company of investors to create a settlement (colony). The boundaries of the Virginia Company's charter went north to present-day New

York, south to present-day South Carolina, and west to the sea. The goal of the charter was to bring wealth to the king and company and spread Christianity to the Native Americans living in that area. The charter gave 20 percent of all gold and silver found in the territory to King James. It also granted all colonists the rights of Englishmen. This meant the laws in England would become the laws of Jamestown. The colonists were also bound to only trade with England. This new settlement would be called Jamestown in honor of the king.

In May 1607, three ships arrived at the southern end of Chesapeake Bay. One hundred and four men and teenagers became the second English colony in America. Years earlier, English colonists at a colony called Roanoke had disappeared without a trace. That colony was farther south than Jamestown. The men knew uncertainty was waiting in the new colony of Jamestown. Perhaps wealth beyond belief would be there.

The place chosen for the fort and houses was on an island. This island was an inlet at the mouth of a freshwater

river that met the Atlantic Ocean. The salt water from the ocean mixed with the fresh water from the river to create a **brackish**, unuseable water supply. The island was also surrounded by wetlands. Wetlands do not provide good living conditions.

The Powhatan Confederacy that lived nearby had villages away from the coast. Fresh water, forests, fields, and fish were all available to them.

The men and boys of Jamestown had nothing but hard work ahead of them. They had let tall tales of unbelievable wealth influence their attitude toward work. The majority of the colonists wanted to look for gold before building shelter and getting a food supply. Very few were interested in having a government to help solve and prevent problems in the settlement. Few of them were interested in building a relationship with the Powhatan Confederacy. None realized that half of them would not be alive the following year.



Engraving showing the arrival of the first English colonists at Jamestown, Virginia, in May 1607

Why was Jamestown founded?



John Smith's map, first published in England in 1612, was the primary map of the Chesapeake region and was used by colonists for nearly a century.

The Construction of James Fort by Sidney E. King, date unknown

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why was tobacco grown on large plantations? What type of workforce was required?

# Werowocomoco

More than 400 years before European settlers arrived, the most significant city of what is now Virginia was Werowocomoco, the seat of power of the Powhatan. Werowocomoco was located across the York River from Jamestown, which was seated on what the English named the James River. The powerful Chief Powhatan lived there with his wives and children. Pocahontas was one of his children. Powhatan was chief of more than 30 tribes. His chiefdom included around 15,000 people! He was able to speak with a wide variety of groups. This enabled him to remain in power for a long time. Not all of the nearby tribes were led by Powhatan, but much of the surrounding area was inhabited by tribes that were. To pay tribute to Powhatan, tribes under his leadership would send food and goods. These were redistributed and used in ceremonial displays. The tributes were also used for rewards and trade.

Werowocomoco was the cultural and religious center for the Powhatan. They had hunted and fished in the area for thousands of years. Since Werowocomoco was located in Purtan Bay and surrounded by water, fishing was a common and important way to obtain food in their hunter-gatherer society. However, fish were not the only food staple. The Powhatan people ate a wide variety of vegetables, meats, and fruits. Their dinner might have included foods such as squirrel or raccoon. Other foods they ate included scallops, raspberries, and corn. There is evidence that Native Americans had already been living in Virginia as far back as 15,000 years before European settlers arrived. They had homes and families there. Powhatan longhouses were called yi-hakan, which is pronounced "yee-ha-cahn." The houses were engineered and built with sturdiness in mind. The foundations of their homes

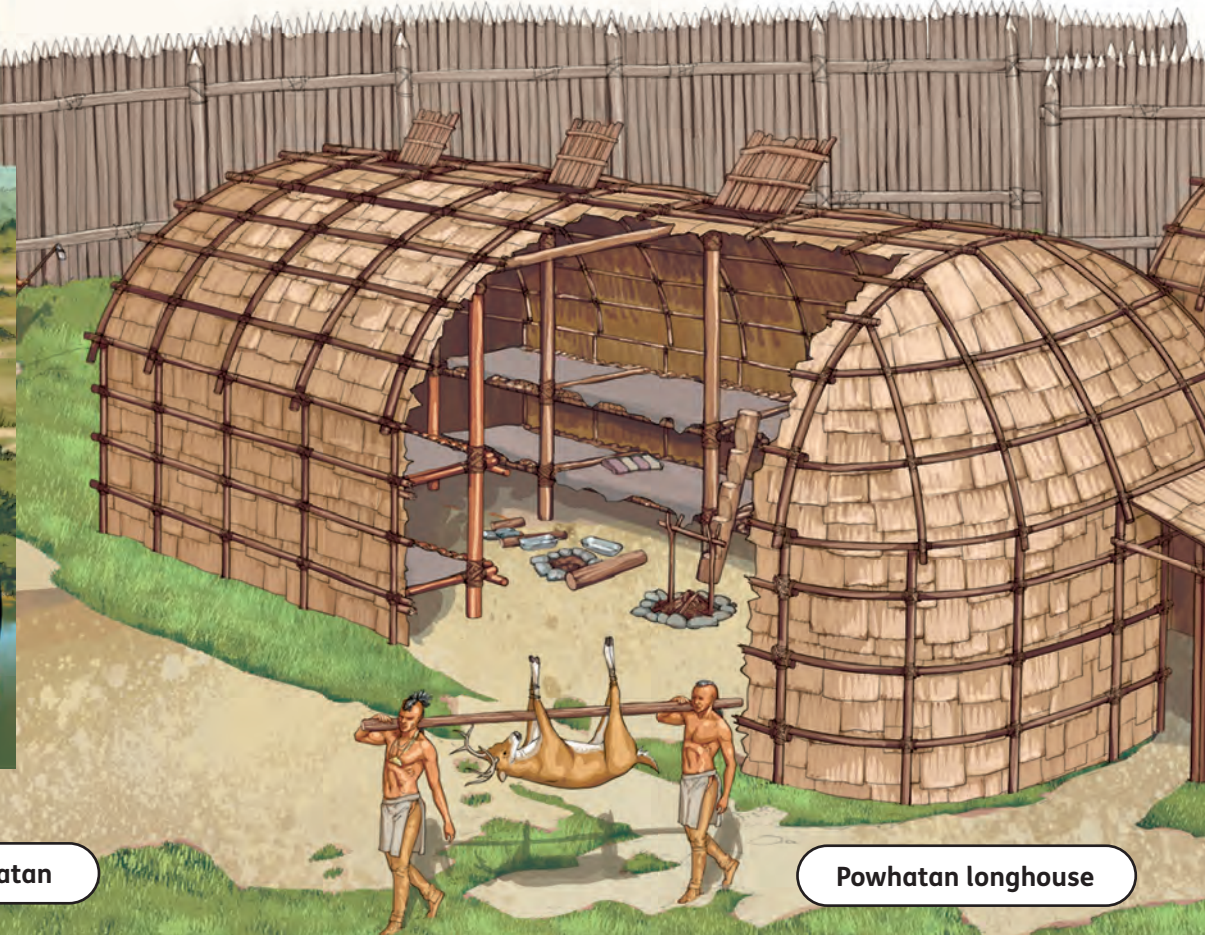
often included saplings set equal distances apart, bent over, and then lashed together. Bark or grass mats were then used as a secondary covering. The Powhatan had nomadic ancestors. They followed herds of animals and did not have a permanent home. By the time the European settlers arrived, however, they had been cultivating the land and farming for long enough that they didn't need to move their houses around. These houses were sturdy and simple. Usually, the more power and wealth an individual had, the longer and larger their home was.

An Englishman named John White came to Virginia in 1585 as part of an

expedition to establish the English colony of Roanoke. The colony failed, but while White was there, he observed life in surrounding Powhatan villages. He painted watercolor pictures of what he saw. His pictures showed well-planned, organized villages. Longhouses were built in the centers of the villages. They were surrounded by farmland with growing crops. Some pictures showed a large circular area surrounded by tall poles or markers with carvings of faces. Villagers were shown actively moving around this circle in a game, dance, or ceremony. White also created portraits of individuals he met in the villages that provide rich details of

their appearances.

Today, there are no remnants of any Powhatan buildings above ground. Werowocomoco was left behind in 1609, just two years after the arrival of the English to Jamestown. The Powhatan sometimes traded food with the colonists and maintained a peaceful relationship with them. At the same time, there was resistance to the English settlers who moved into their territory. The Powhatan fought to protect and keep their land. In time, the English settlers became too numerous and powerful to resist. The Powhatan eventually moved farther inland and would continue to be pushed farther from the coast with each conflict.



Chief Powhatan

Powhatan longhouse

# Survival in Jamestown

The first colonists in Jamestown had heard rumors about gold lying on the ground waiting to be gathered. This temptation was hard to resist. The reality was that life in Virginia was harsh and cruel. Most of these men were adventurers and gentlemen. They did not know how to farm or hunt. Fortunately, practical men of the Virginia Company, such as Captain John Smith and some of the crew, knew about survival. However, a few men could not do the work of 100.

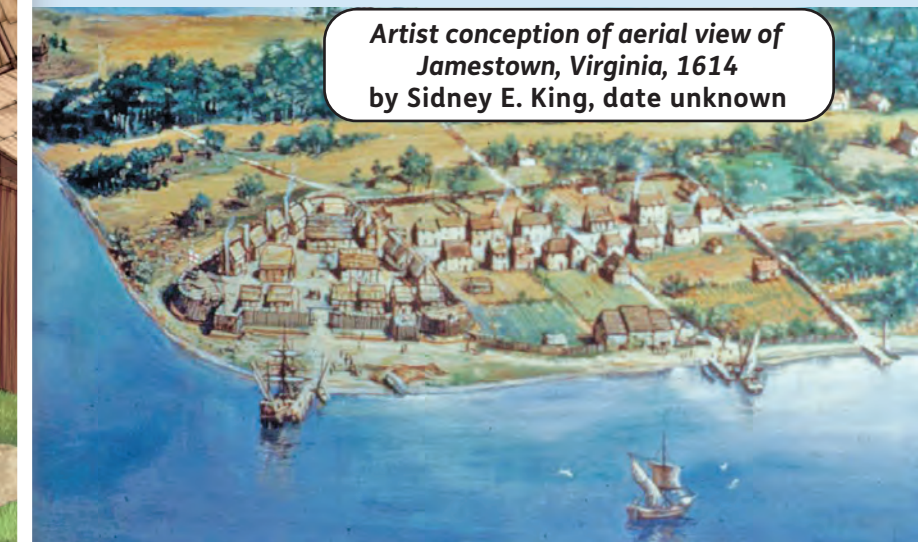
The men in Jamestown were relying on supply ships being sent on a regular basis. Instead of making or looking for food, they spent their time looking for riches. They also thought they could get food from the Powhatan through trade or force. They did not plant enough crops. They did not protect their food storage from rats and other animals.

By 1609, supply ships had come twice with supplies but also more settlers to feed. This temporarily helped the colony. Captain Smith had been trusted by the Powhatan and had helped maintain trade. However, he was injured in an accident and had to return to England.

The Powhatan stopped trading food. They saw weakness in the English and wanted to use it against them to take their land back. When Jamestown sent hunting parties out, the Powhatan made sure the hunters did not return.

Jamestown needed food to get through the winter. The Virginia Company stocked a fleet of ships to send to Jamestown. However, the fleet encountered a hurricane in the Caribbean and was scattered and damaged. Without the supplies, the colonists became desperate. Hunger and disease changed what people did to survive. There is evidence of betrayal, fighting, and death within the colony. Many people starved to death.

The effort to establish a permanent English colony in America came at a high cost to human life. In December 1609, there were 220 colonists in Jamestown. By spring, there were 60. This winter of 1609-1610 became known as the "Starving Time."



Artist conception of aerial view of Jamestown, Virginia, 1614 by Sidney E. King, date unknown

# To Work or Not to Work

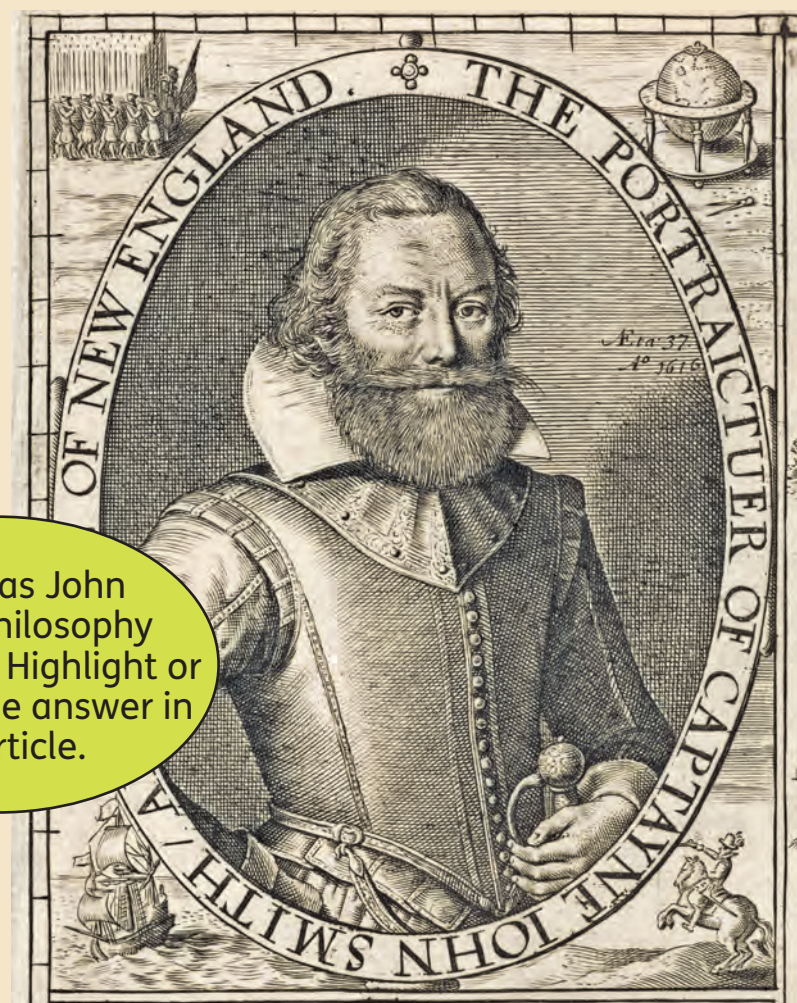
Life in Virginia posed many threats to Jamestown Colony's survival. These dangers ranged from the climate to exposure to the raw wilderness to native peoples fighting for their land. Through a series of events, Captain John Smith became Jamestown's political leader as well as its military leader.

Smith was a professional soldier, and the people of the Virginia Company felt he would be a big help. He had discipline and experience in directing men. Smith directed the construction of a fort for protection. He planned and ordered work teams to farm, fish, and hunt. Recognizing the dangers of the brackish water, Smith also ordered a freshwater well to be dug. This saved many lives by providing good water.

When Smith made contact with the Powhatan Confederacy, he traded for supplies for the colonists. If negotiations failed, he resorted to stealing food from the Powhatan storage areas. Smith also posted guards at the colonist's food storage area and enforced rationing. Captain Smith ordered, "He who does not work, shall not eat."

Smith became president of the council when he was the only surviving member of the original council appointed by the company. However, many thought he took his authority too far. The men of Jamestown were not soldiers. Many of the colonists resented his strict form of leadership.

However, Jamestown survived under Smith's leadership until an accidental injury forced Smith to return to England in 1608.



John Smith, from an illustration in *The Generall Historie of Virginia*, engraved by John Barra, 1624

What was John Smith's philosophy about work? Highlight or underline the answer in the article.

# Populating Jamestown

Jamestown was founded by the Virginia Company. Everything in the settlement was owned by the Virginia Company. The tools, equipment, and buildings belonged to the company. The company controlled the government. The board of directors in London appointed the governing council. The council then controlled the work schedule of the men. Work meant profit

didn't feel very invested in their future. After seven years of working for the Virginia Company, the men could own their own land. Until then, there was little incentive to put much energy into the work. Jamestown was a workspace, not a community. Only men were allowed to be members of the company, so no families were in Jamestown.

For years, the colony had little growth in population or in profit. In 1609, John Rolfe was a new colonist to Jamestown. John Rolfe transformed the profits of the

Virginia Company with the introduction of one crop: tobacco.

Tobacco brought in a good profit for Jamestown. The large fields of tobacco needed large growing space and intensive physical labor. Jamestown had lots of land, but it didn't have many people.

In 1618, John Rolfe was key in getting the Virginia Company to change the rules for Jamestown to allow families. Families brought different craftsmen and merchants to the town. There was a need for new trade goods. More people brought more trade.

The charter changed. It gave property rights for individuals, not the company. The need for labor in the tobacco fields was critical. The Virginia Company offered 50 acres of land to any man willing to commit to starting a business and raising a family in Jamestown. They paid passage for any women who wanted to emigrate and marry a man in Jamestown. John Rolfe married Pocahontas and started a family. Many other men found brides and started families. The population increased. Jamestown became a community rather than a workspace.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Types of Governments in Jamestown

Government in Jamestown Colony went through several different phases.

The charter for the Virginia Company guaranteed colonists the rights of Englishmen. This included the right to a representative government. However, Jamestown was owned by a company. This company chose seven men to act as the governing council in Jamestown.

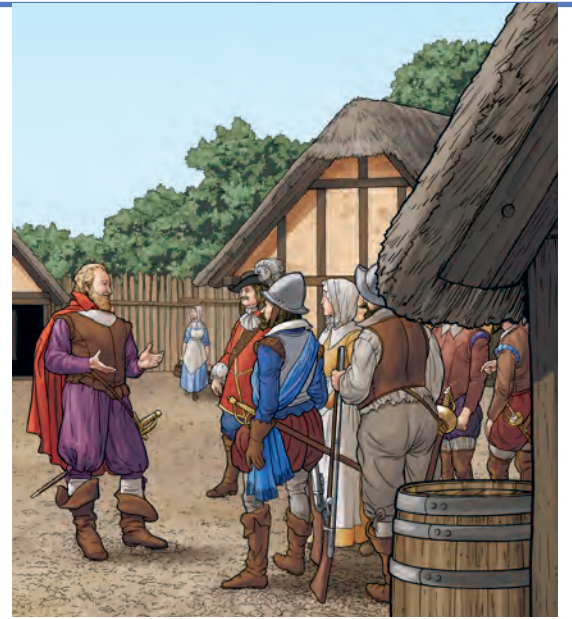
This first government was set up to manage company workers. The seven council members made the rules. When authority rests with a group of men, like in early Jamestown, the government is called an **oligarchy**.

In 1608, Captain John Smith was chosen to be president of the council. He was the only surviving member of the original council. Smith relied on strict military rules and consequences. He had all the authority. The men had none. This

kind of military rule can be called a **junta**.

When Captain Smith returned to England, the Virginia Company appointed Sir Thomas West, 12th baron De La Warr, as governor. He arrived in June 1610. He had no governing experience. He did not involve the colonists in any decision-making. De La Warr returned to England and left his deputy governor in charge. The colonists resisted many of the governor's orders. Because the governor had the sole authority, resistance was met with severe punishment.

By 1619, the Virginia Company in London had renegotiated the terms of the charter with King James I. In this revised charter, a new form of government emerged. White men who owned property chose representatives to make laws for them in assembly meetings. They met in the town hall on a regular basis.



This became the **House of Burgesses**. The rule of law was established. Every person became equally accountable in court. This type of government is called a **representative democracy**.

## Tobacco

Tobacco seeds are tiny. One seed is smaller than the head of a pin. The plant, however, can grow to be as tall as a man, and the leaves can be two feet wide.

In colonial times, tobacco needed two cleared fields to grow successfully. The first field was where the seeds were sown and grown into sprouted plants. When they were big enough, they were transplanted to the second field.

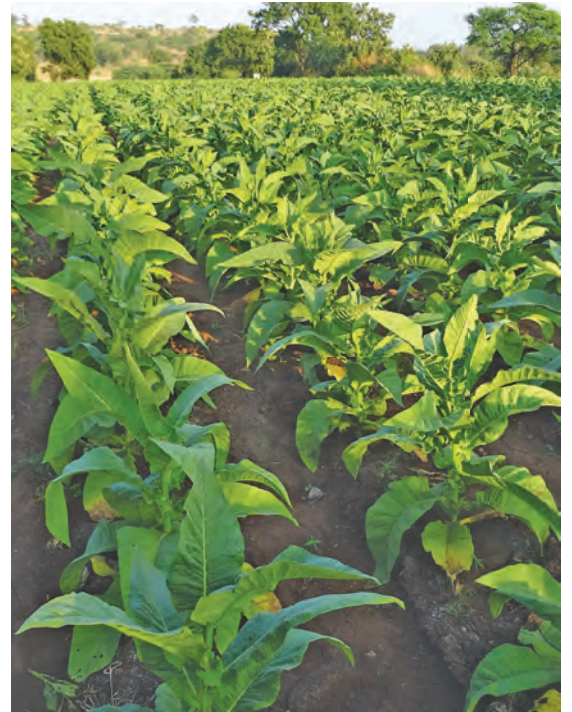
Each tobacco plant was moved to a mound of dirt. The mounds were knee-high and three or four feet apart. An experienced planter could make 500 mounds in a day. It was hard, dirty, tiring work.

Once the plants were healthy and growing, they had to be checked by someone every day. The soil was turned, all of the weeds were pulled, the tops of the plants were trimmed off, and shoots were removed so only a few

leaves remained. These leaves received all the sun's energy and nutrition from the soil so they could grow large. Destructive worms had to be picked off of the leaves by hand.

When the tobacco was ready, the mature leaves were cut, stacked, and hung up in bunches to dry and cure. Cured leaves were twisted into a rope and wound into balls that could weigh as much as 100 pounds. Finally, the tobacco was packed into barrels to be sent to England.

The process would begin again the next year. From January through November, tobacco required attention from many people. This is why it was called a labor-intensive crop. Virginia's brand of tobacco was very popular in England. It became very profitable, and large farms called plantations developed. These plantations required more and more laborers to produce the crops.



Tobacco plants

## Slavery in Jamestown

By 1614, tobacco was a cash crop for the Virginia Company. The company needed to attract more people to settle and grow tobacco. They began the "Headright System" in 1618. Each man received 50 acres of land as personal property. Landowners claimed another 50 acres for each person they were responsible for. These could be family, indentured servants, or workers.

In August 1619, a ship came to Virginia with a cargo of 20 people from Africa. These people had been captured in Angola, an area in West Africa. They were forced by their captors to march 100 miles to the slave traders on the sea coast. They were sold to the Portuguese and then stolen by Dutch privateers.

Initially, the first Africans were offered as low-cost indentured servants. There are court records indicating a few gained their freedom and received land. This was the exception, not the norm.

Landowners saw people from Africa as workers for their plantations. Under the headright system, the landowners would get an additional 50 acres of land. It didn't take

long for white landowners to no longer offer indentures to the captive Africans. Instead, they purchased them to be enslaved for life.

The plantation owners registered each enslaved African at the land register office. This new workforce would work the tobacco fields the landowners had just gained. More labor to cultivate the tobacco meant a bigger harvest. A bigger harvest meant greater profit for the owner. This drive for profit influenced the plantation owners in the treatment of their workers. The people who were enslaved worked long days in the hot and humid climate of Virginia. Cultivating tobacco was labor-intensive. The landowners had a sense of superiority over all the workers on their plantations and treated them as property to be commanded.

This began the slave trade in Virginia, from 20 people in 1619 to hundreds of thousands over the next two centuries. Men, women, and children were taken captive in Africa. They were sold to plantation owners to grow and maintain a plantation system for cash crops.



Landing [enslaved people] at Jamestown from Dutch man-of-war, 1619, created 1901