

Key Jamestown People and Events

Captain John Smith and Leadership:

Captain John Smith arrived in Virginia with the original settlers in 1607 and was named as one of the seven councilors to lead the colony. Because of his military background, he was involved in numerous expeditions and exploratory trips after arriving at Jamestown. He had frequent involvement with the Powhatan Indians and became quite knowledgeable about them. When Smith became president of the council in the fall of 1608, he enforced discipline and trained men in military skills. He negotiated with the Indians and proved to be a good trader, obtaining essential food and supplies at critical times. By 1609, however, he was becoming more aggressive in his ways, and he angered the Indians. Even so, he is often credited with saving the colony from a certain failure.

Chief Powhatan and His Aid to the English:

By the time the English arrived in Virginia, Chief Powhatan loosely controlled over 30 tribal groups and had centrally located his headquarters at Werowocomoco on the York River. The initial reaction of some of his tribes to the English was to confront and attack the strangers. In fact, the English were attacked upon the first day of their arrival, and again soon after they had selected the site for their settlement and began building their fort. But Powhatan's response was to tell the tribal leaders to meet the English, wait and see what they planned to do and how long they intended to stay. During the next few months, Powhatan made several overtures to the English, mostly through John Smith, trying to see what he could get from establishing a tenuous relationship with the English through this leader. Powhatan was willing to trade and negotiate with the English, providing much needed food at times when the colonists were on the brink of starvation. By 1609, however, Powhatan had become angry with John Smith and his aggressive ways.

Pocahontas and her Interaction with the English:

Pocahontas was said by many to be "a favored daughter" of the powerful Virginia Indian leader, Chief Powhatan. She is often credited with saving the life of Captain John Smith when, according to Smith, as the Indians laid his head on two stones as if to beat out his brains, Pocahontas took his head in her arms and laid her head upon his to save him from death. Whether or not this is true is uncertain. However, it is known that Pocahontas and John Smith became friends. In early 1608 Pocahontas accompanied other Indians who took food to the settlers at Jamestown. In return, she persuaded John Smith to release some Indian prisoners. The following year she warned him of an Indian plot to take his life. In 1613, the colonists kidnapped Pocahontas for ransom. She remained with the colonists and may have been instrumental in a temporary peace between the colonists and Indians during which time the colony grew. Pocahontas met John Rolfe, a planter, and married him in April 1614. The next year Pocahontas gave birth to a son, Thomas. During this time, peace was maintained between the two groups, allowing the young Colony to grow.

Captain Christopher Newport and his Re-supply Voyages:

On December 10, 1606, Captain Newport was commissioned to sail under the auspices of the Virginia Company of London with sole command of the three ship fleet – the *Susan Constant*, the *Godspeed* and the *Discovery* – which set sail for Virginia with 105 men and boys that same

month. Captain Newport was a seasoned mariner of the English royal navy. On the trip to Virginia, he was in charge of a box that contained the names of the first councilors for the Virginia colony. His good judgment in keeping these names secret until across the Atlantic has been recognized as worthy, as well as his ability to deal with disputes such as when John Smith was incarcerated and charged with mutiny during the voyage. Calling upon his experience trading with the natives in the West Indies, Newport proved at times to be adept at dealing with the Powhatan Indians in Virginia. He and his men often shared food and tobacco with Chief Powhatan and other chiefs, obtained food for the settlers, and avoided conflict whenever possible. Captain Newport was involved in four more voyages to Virginia, carrying supplies and more people to the colony. His third re-supply voyage to Virginia was an ambitious attempt to bring a nine-ship fleet to Jamestown. During the voyage, a violent storm separated the largest ship, the *Sea Venture*, from the rest of the supply and shipwrecked it on the deserted island of Bermuda. Newport spent the next nine months there with 150 others, where they built two small ships which eventually carried them to Jamestown. It is his four re-supply trips to Jamestown between 1607 – 1611 that many believe saved the fledgling colony from failing as the one at Roanoke had failed when it did not receive supplies in time to help it survive.

Lord de la Warr and Martial Law:

Lord de la Warr, a high-ranking nobleman and soldier, was appointed the colony's first governor in 1610. As a result of the severe problems which had beset the colony from its beginning in 1607, it was agreed that the king should be petitioned for a new charter in 1609. The new charter provided for the appointment of a governor who was given extensive powers, including the right to enforce martial law if necessary. When Lord de la Warr and his party arrived at Jamestown in early June of 1610, they found the settlers on their ships, waiting for the tide to turn, ready to abandon Jamestown. The dispirited settlers were ordered to return to Jamestown with the good news that de la Warr had brought ample supplies to get the settlers through the coming months. From being on the brink of collapse, the colony now had a full complement of leaders, some 500 settlers, and for the first time in a year, it was well provisioned. De la Warr acted quickly to rebuild the colony. He rebuilt the palisade and other buildings for the colonists. He established order and discipline, enforcing a strict code of military laws. For a time, Jamestown was again saved from failure.

John Rolfe and the Introduction of Tobacco:

John Rolfe was a planter on board the ship *Sea Venture* when it shipwrecked off the coast of Bermuda in 1609 as a result of a hurricane. After his delayed arrival in Virginia, Rolfe obtained tobacco seeds from somewhere in the Caribbean, possibly Trinidad, and experimented with a new variety which he planted around 1612. Rolfe shipped his crop to England where it compared favorably with "Spanish" leaf and became quite popular. Because of its reputation for having a pleasant taste, as well as medicinal qualities, the demand for tobacco in England continued to grow. Eventually, tobacco became the "cash crop" of Virginia and the economic salvation of the colony. When John Rolfe wed Pocahontas, daughter of Chief Powhatan, in 1614, this event contributed to a long peace between the English and the Powhatan Indians, during which time planters could plant and harvest crops without fear of attack. Rolfe, accompanied by his wife, Pocahontas, traveled to England to market Virginia's new crop. The great popularity of tobacco in England, with both men and women, signaled the success of Virginia as a colony.

Ann Burras and Contributions of Women:

Ann Burras was one of the first two women to arrive at Jamestown in 1608. She was a maid to Mistress Forrest, and soon after her arrival she married laborer John Laydon. This was the first Jamestown wedding. Ann survived the terrible “starving time” of 1609-1610 and became the mother of four daughters who were raised during very difficult times in Virginia. Though others followed, English women at Jamestown were few in number until 1620 when approximately 90 single women arrived with the clear intention of bringing a sense of permanence to the colony. The year before, while receiving grants of land from the Virginia Company as dividends for their time in Virginia, the male settlers also requested allotments of land for their wives, because they knew women were crucial to the colony’s survival. Even though in 1620 men continued to outnumber women by about six to one, the role of women cannot be minimized. They were a stabilizing force in Virginia and played an indispensable role in the development of Jamestown as the first permanent English settlement in North America.

Angela and Arrival of Angolans :

Angela, known in Virginia records as Angelo, probably was born in the African kingdom of Ndongo, now part of the modern nation of Angola. It is likely that she was captured and enslaved in the spring of 1619 by a Portuguese army making war on Ndongo. Like other Angolans enslaved by the Portuguese, she probably was given religious instruction in the Catholic faith. She took the Christian name Angela at her baptism. The name was later incorrectly recorded as “Angelo” by the English. Angela and the other first Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619 aboard the *White Lion* and *Treasurer*. Angela was sold to a tobacco farmer, and it is not known if she ever became free. Growing tobacco in Virginia was profitable for planters, but it required a large amount of land and a considerable labor force. At first, indentured servants from Europe were able to fill this need, but as the century progressed, fewer Europeans wanted to come to Virginia. Planters began to import Africans to work in their tobacco fields. Without this forced labor from Africa, the economic future of the Virginia colony would have been in doubt.

Other?

Are there other persons you would consider essential to the survival of Jamestown? You may suggest them, but you must include background information such as that given above, along with a rationale for including them.

Lesson plans made possible by Archibald Andrews Marks.