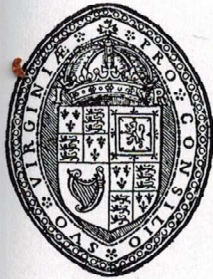


4 English Settlers Come to Stay



The crown and coat of arms on the Virginia Company's seal show that it was granted by the king.

In Virginia, April is a sweet month. Strawberries and white dogwoods blossom below the green of tall pines. Redbuds are emerging, and so are grape leaves, honeysuckle, and wild roses.

It was thus in April of 1607, when three small ships landed at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. The ships were the *Susan Constant*, the *Discovery*, and the *Godspeed*, and they had been sent from England by a business corporation called the London Company.

They were the same three ships that left the docks on the river Thames. The voyagers had been told to look for gold and a river or passage that would go through the country to China and Japan. They were also to see if there were other ways to make money on this unknown continent.

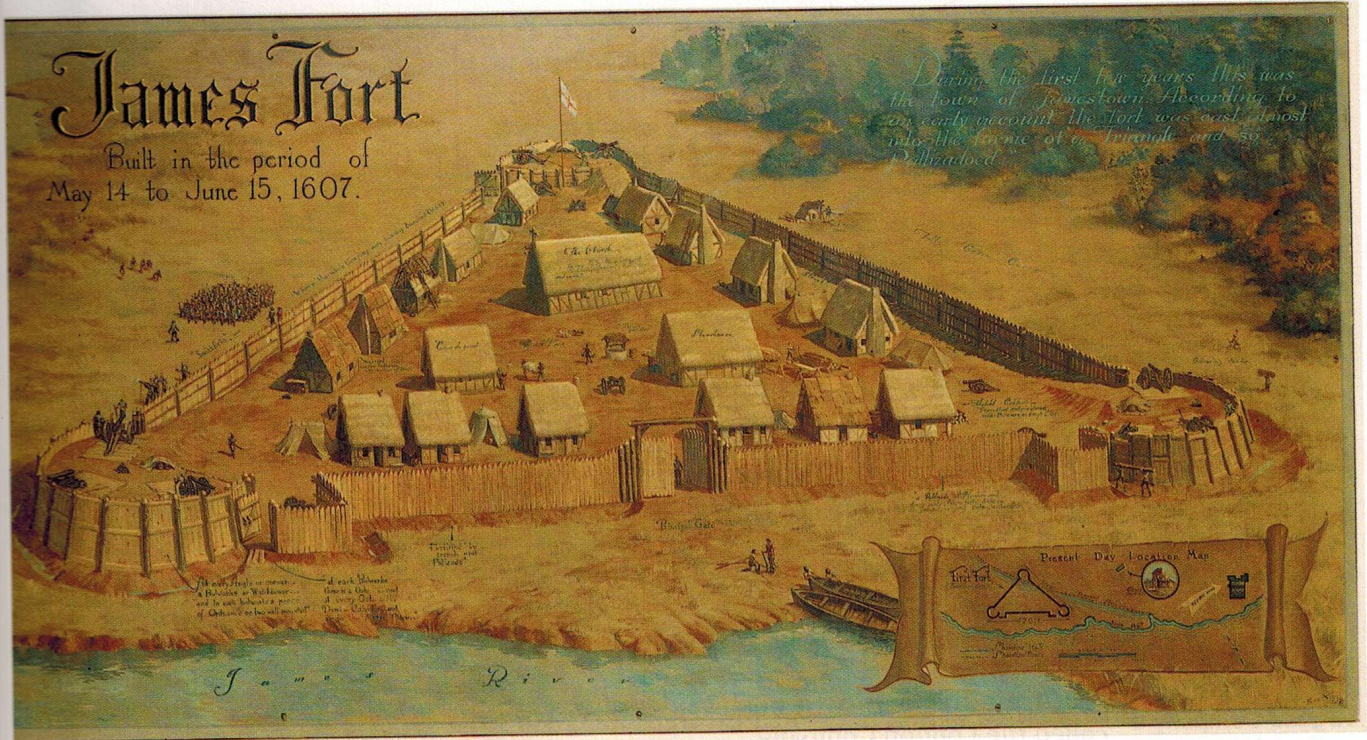
The ships anchored near an elbow of beach they named Cape Henry (in honor of young Henry, the king's oldest son). Some of the mariners rowed to shore and set out exploring. "We could find nothing worth the speaking of, but fair meadows and goodly tall trees, with such fresh waters running through the woods, as I was almost ravished at the first sight thereof," wrote George Percy, who was one of the gentlemen adventurers.

On their way back to the ship the Englishmen were attacked by Indians, who came "creeping upon all fours...like bears, with their bows in their mouths," but when "they felt the sharpness of our shot, they retired into the woods with a great noise."

The local Indians knew about white men, and they didn't want them around. Spain—England's old enemy—had tried to start two colonies in the Chesapeake Bay area. An Indian prince from the re-

From the instructions of the London Company to the First Settlers:

"When it shall please God to Send you on the Coast of Virginia you shall Do your best endeavour to find out a safe fort in the Entrance of some navigable River making Choice of Such a one as runneth furthest into the Land, and if you happen to Discover Divers [diverse] portable [navigable] Rivers and amongst them any one that hath two main branches if the Difference be not Great make Choice of that which bendeth most towards the Northwest for that way shall You soonest find the Other Sea."



Jamestown, as it looked in 1607. The settlement is protected by a ditch and palisade (a high fence made of stakes). A baking oven is outside the wall (why outside?). In the center is a church. Most of the houses have thatched roofs made from river grass or reeds, but some are covered with tree bark (an idea borrowed from the Indians). Today the place where Jamestown once stood is an active archaeological site. Archaeologists have located evidence of all three sides of the fort. You can also visit a reconstructed Jamestown nearby.



gion had been taken to Spain, baptized a Christian, educated, and returned to his people. That prince had far more schooling than most of the Englishmen who now wished to invade his land. The Englishmen didn't seem to know any of that. They thought of the Indians as savages.

The Englishmen spent a few weeks exploring the bay area. They feasted on strawberries ("four times bigger and better than ours in England"), ate oysters ("which were very large and delicate in taste"), and noticed grapevines ("in bigness as a man's thigh"). The oysters and mussels "lay on the ground as thick as stones; we opened

John Smith's portrait labels him "Admirall of New England." (Today *admiral* is spelled with one *l*. Do you see any other old-fashioned spellings?) Even if this wasn't an official title bestowed by the king, Smith deserved it: he not only explored and mapped Virginia but charted the New England coast from Cape Cod to Maine.

some, and found in many of them pearls...as for sturgeon [there were so many of these fish] all the world cannot be compared to it."

They planted a cross at Cape Henry, thanked God for their safe voyage, and watched as Captain Newport opened a sealed metal box. The box had been entrusted to him by the London Company. (Newport would soon sail back to England.) He opened the box and read six names and his own. They were to be members of a council and elect a president. One of the names was a surprise. It was John Smith; he was locked up in the ship's belly.

Smith was of yeoman (YO-mun) stock—and feisty; he was not one of the gentlemen. He had angered some of those gentlemen and they had put him in chains. They were planning to send him back to England. Now they would have to work with him.

The instructions in the box said they were to go inland, up a river, and find a suitable place for their colony. So they left the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay and sailed up a river they called the James, to a site they named Jamestown.

Several men, including John Smith and Christopher Newport, went on, up the James River, in search of a passage to China. They had no idea of the size of the country. When they saw breaking waves, they were sure they had found the western coast and the Pacific Ocean. John Smith wrote in his log of the "ocean ahead."

They soon discovered that the waves were caused by water tumbling over rapids in the river. They were at a site that would someday be the city of Richmond. The river would not let them go farther.

All those Jameses—the James River and Jamestown—were named to honor the new king, James I. When Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, still unmarried and childless, her cousin James was brought from Scotland to become king of the United Kingdom of Scotland and England.

King James had worked out a kind of deal with the Spaniards. It went like this: we English will stop raiding your ships if you Spaniards will promise not to attack our settlers. So the new settlers weren't as worried about Spanish attackers as they might have been in the 16th century. As it turned out, there may have been Spanish spies among them.

But it was gold that was on their mind when they reached Jamestown, and they soon began searching for it. They also built rough huts for shelter and a triangular fort for protection.

Jamestown was almost an island, with a narrow sandbar link to the mainland. It would be easy to defend against Indian raids or against ships, just in case the Spaniards did decide to come up the river. Besides, deep water touched the land. They could sail right up to the site and tie their ships to trees.

A **yeoman** was a small farmer who cultivated his own land (it was the area of land that was small, not necessarily the farmer). John Smith came from a yeoman background—he himself did other things with his life.



James I wasn't a bad man. He was very learned about many subjects, but couldn't deal with people very well. He was kind and generous to his friends, but tactless with those he didn't know. He disapproved of tobacco smoking because he thought it filthy and disgusting, but he never washed himself—and he had terrible table manners.

Christopher

Newport sailed back to England. The adventurers were on their own in America. Newport thought he had gold when he took a barrel of shiny earth back to England. It turned out to be "fool's gold" (iron pyrites).

As it turned out, they couldn't have picked a worse spot. The land was swampy, the drinking water was bad; it was hot in summer and bone-chilling in winter. The mosquitoes drove the settlers crazy and carried malaria germs.

They might have handled all that if they had been a decent bunch. But, for the most part, they were lazy and vain and fought among themselves. And their first two leaders were incompetent—which means they made a mess of the job.

All were men; they brought no women. Remember, most were gentlemen, with no training or taste for hard work. To be fair, they had been misled about the New World. They expected to find gold at their feet, and they wasted valuable time looking for it. And there wasn't a farmer among them.

To make things worse, the London Company, which had paid for the voyage, showed poor sense. It gave all the colonists salaries and did not allow them to own property. No one had a reason to work hard, because the hard workers got the same pay as those who did nothing.

Besides all that, they had bad luck—lots of bad luck. The worst may have been that they brought some English germs across the sea. One was a typhoid fever germ that killed many of them. Tidewater Virginia had other germs (especially dysentery germs) that made some sicken and die. The Indians killed still others. Some starved. What happened to those eager men and boys who had stood on London's docks in December? Fewer than half of them saw another December.

Yet the news wasn't all bad. This was the first English colony that survived in the New World. A few things had to go right to make that happen. One man, more than any other, helped make things go right. He was short, scrappy, red-bearded John Smith—who had come to Virginia in chains. He was Jamestown's third president and a born leader, even though many of the voyagers didn't like him.

The settlers built small houses of wattle and daub—sticks and clay. They finished just in time to stave off their first Indian attack on May 26, 1607.

From *The Proceedings of the English Colony in Virginia, 1612*: "There was no talk, no hope, no work, but dig gold, wash gold, refine gold, load gold, such a bruit [noise] of gold, as one mad fellow desired to be buried in the sands, lest they should by their art make gold of his bones."

