The Settlement of the Chesapeake

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Reasons for European Migrations to the Americas in the 17th Century

The Pull to Settle in America
1. Word-of-mouth information about America
2. Effective work and writing by recruiters
3. Appeal of land and economic opportunities
4. Desire to join earlier migrants to America
5. Safe pursuit of personal religious beliefs
6. Hope of educating and converting Indians

The Push to Leave Home in Europe
1. Escape from direct religious persecution
2. Fear regarding the religious future at home
3. Anxiety about political change in Europe
4. Dismay over economy; need for farmland
5. Relief from joblessness or personal adversity
6. Restlessness and desire for adventure
Virginia
English Colonization

The Charter of the Virginia Company:

- Guaranteed to colonists the same rights as Englishmen as if they had stayed in England.
- This provision was incorporated into future colonists' documents.
- Colonists felt that, even in the Americas, they had the rights of Englishmen!
England Plants the Jamestown “Seedling”

- Late 1606 → VA Co. sends out 3 ships
- Spring 1607 → land at mouth of Chesapeake Bay.
  - Attacked by Indians and move on.
- May 24, 1607 → about 100 colonists [all men] land at Jamestown, along banks of James River
  - Easily defended, but swarming with disease-causing mosquitoes.
Jamestown Settlement, 1609
Chesapeake Bay

Geographic/environmental problems??
Jamestown Fort & Settlement (Computer Generated)
Jamestown Settlement
Jamestown Chapel, 1611
The Jamestown Nightmare

- 1606-1607 → 40 people died on the voyage to the New World.
- 1609 → another ship from England lost its leaders and supplies in a shipwreck off Bermuda.
- Settlers died by the dozens!
- “Gentlemen” colonists would not work themselves.
  - Game in forests & fish in river uncaught.
- Settlers wasted time looking for gold instead of hunting or farming.
Captain John Smith: The Right Man for the Job??

There was no talk...but dig gold, wash gold, refine gold, load gold...
Pocahontas

Pocahontas “saves” Captain John Smith

A 1616 engraving
River Settlement Pattern

- Large plantations [>100 acres].
- Widely spread apart [>5 miles].

Social/Economic PROBLEMS???
Jamestown Colonization Pattern: 1620-1660
High Mortality Rates

The “Starving Time”:

- 1607: 104 colonists
- By spring, 1608: 38 survived
- 1609: 300 more immigrants
- By spring, 1610: 60 survived
- 1610 – 1624: 10,000 immigrants
- 1624 population: 1,200
- Adult life expectancy: 40 years
- Death of children before age 5: 80%
“Widowarchy”

High mortality among husbands and fathers left many women in the Chesapeake colonies with unusual autonomy and wealth!
Chief Powhatan

Powhatan Confederacy

- Powhatan dominated a few dozen small tribes in the James River area when the English arrived.
- The English called all Indians in the area Powhatans.
- Powhatan probably saw the English as allies in his struggles to control other Indian tribes in the region.
Powhatan Confederacy
Powhatan Indian Village
Indian Foods


Culture Clash in the Chesapeake

Relations between Indians & settlers grew worse.

- General mistrust because of different cultures & languages.
- English raided Indian food supplies during the starving times.

1610-1614 → First Anglo-Powhatan War

- De La Warr had orders to make war on the Indians.
  - Raided villages, burned houses, took supplies, burned cornfields.
Smith's Portrayal of Native Americans
Culture Clash in the Chesapeake

1614-1622 → peace between Powhatans and the English.
  • 1614 peace sealed by the marriage of Pocahontas to Englishman John Rolfe.

1622-1644 → periodic attacks between Indians and settlers.
  • 1622 → Indians attacked the English, killing 347 [including John Rolfe].
  • Virginia Co. called for a “perpetual war” against the Native Americans.
    ➢ Raids reduced native population and drove them further westward.
Powhatan Uprising of 1622
Culture Clash in the Chesapeake

1644-1646 → Second Anglo-Powhatan War
- Last effort of natives to defeat English.
- Indians defeated again.

Peace Treaty of 1646
- Removed the Powhatans from their original land.
- Formally separated Indian and English settlement areas!
John Rolfe

What finally made the colony prosperous??
Tobacco Plant

Virginia’s gold and silver.
-- John Rolfe, 1612
Early Colonial Tobacco

1618 — Virginia produces 20,000 pounds of tobacco.

1622 — Despite losing nearly one-third of its colonists in an Indian attack, Virginia produces 60,000 pounds of tobacco.

1627 — Virginia produces 500,000 pounds of tobacco.

1629 — Virginia produces 1,500,000 pounds of tobacco.
Tobacco Prices: 1618-1710

Why did tobacco prices decline so precipitously?
Indentured Servitude

Headright System

Indentured Contract, 1746
**Indentured Servitude**

**Headright System:**
- Each Virginian got 50 acres for each person whose passage they paid.

**Indenture Contract:**
- 5-7 years.
- Promised “freedom dues” [land, £]
- Forbidden to marry.
- 1610-1614: only 1 in 10 outlived their indentured contracts!
Richard Frethorne’s 1623 Letter

In-Class Activity:

1. Describe the life of the indentured servant as presented in this letter.
2. What are some of the problems he and the other servants experienced?
3. What are their biggest fears?
4. What does a historian learn about life in the 17c Chesapeake colony?