

JAMESTOWN: 1607, THE FIRST MONTHS

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Observations Gathered out of a
*Discourse of the Plantation of the
Southern Colony in Virginia
by the English, 1606.*

Written by that honorable Gentleman,
Master George Percy.

London: 1608 ❖ Excerpts

In December 1606 three ships left England with 144 men and boys to establish a Virginia colony, chartered by King James I and funded by investors in the London Company. One of the thirty-eight noblemen in the expedition was George Percy, who twice served as the colony's governor. He left Virginia in 1612 to return to England.



APRIL 1607

... The six and twentieth day of April, about four o'clock in the morning, we descried the Land of Virginia. The same day we entered into the Bay of Chesupioc [Chesapeake] directly, without any let or hindrance. There we landed and discovered [explored] a little way, but 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.

At night, when we were going aboard, there came the Savages creeping upon all fours, from the Hills, like Bears, with their Bows in their mouths, [who] charged us very desperately in the faces, hurt Captain Gabriel Archer in both his hands, and a sailor in two places of the body very dangerous. After they had spent their Arrows, and felt the sharpness of our shot, they retired into the Woods with a great noise, and so left us.

The seven and twentieth day we began to build up our Shallop [small boat]. The Gentle- men and Soldiers marched eight miles up into the land. We could not see a Savage in all that march. We came to a place where they had made a great fire, and had been newly roasting Oysters. When they perceived our coming, they fled away to the mountains, and left many of the Oysters in the fire. We eat some of the Oysters, which were very large and delicate in taste.

The eighteenth day [28th] we launched our Shallop. The Captain and some Gentlemen went in her, and discovered [explored] up the Bay. We found a River on the Southside running into the Main[land]; we entered it and found it very shallow water, not for any Boats to swim. We went further into the Bay, and saw a plain plot of ground where we went on Land, and found the place five mile in compass, without either Bush or Tree. We saw nothing there but a Canoe, which was made out of the whole tree, which was five and forty foot long by the Rule. Upon this plot of ground we got good store of Mussels and Oysters, which lay on the ground as thick as stones. We opened some, and found in many of them Pearls.

We marched some three or four miles further into the woods, where we saw great smokes of fire. We marched to those smokes and found that the Savages had been there burning down the grass, as we thought either to make their plantation there, or else to give signs to bring their forces together, and so to give us battle. . . .

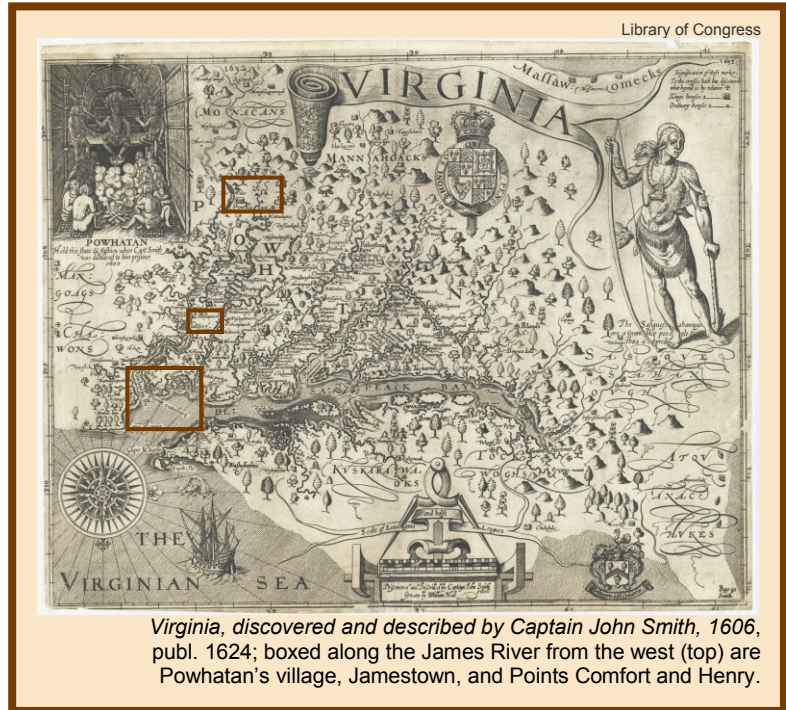
All this march we could neither see Savage nor Town. When it grew to be towards night, we stood back to our Ships, we sounded and found it shallow water for a great way, which put us out of all hopes for getting any higher with our Ships, which rode at the mouth of the River. We rowed over to a point of Land, where we found a channel, and sounded six, eight, ten, or twelve fathoms: which put us in good comfort. Therefore we named that point of Land Cape Comfort.

The nine and twentieth day we set up a Cross at Chesupioc Bay, and named that place Cape Henry. Thirtieth day, we came with our ships to Cape Comfort; where we saw five Savages running on the shore. Presently the Captain caused the

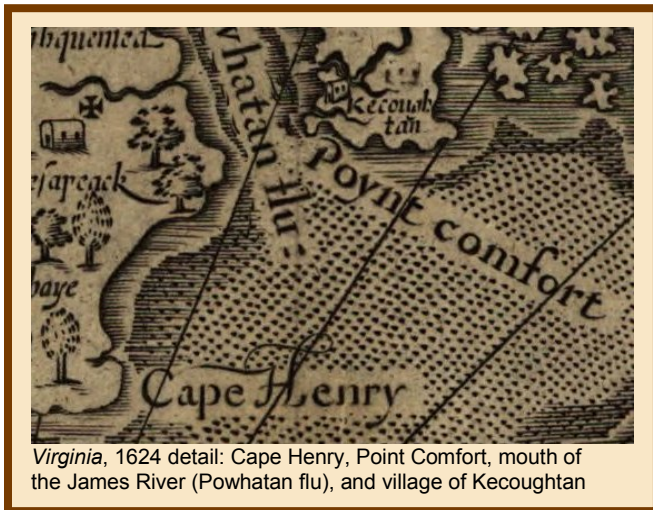
shallop to be manned; so rowing to the shore, the Captain called to them in sign of friendship, but they were at first very timorous, until they saw the Captain lay his hand on his heart; upon that they laid down their Bows and Arrows, and came very boldly to us, making signs to come ashore to their Town, which is called by the Savages Kecoughtan [“great town,” commanded by a son of Powhatan]. We coasted to their Town, rowing over a River running into the Main[land], where these Savages swam over with their Bows and Arrows in their mouths.

When we came over to the other side, there was a many of other Savages which directed us to their Town, where we were entertained by them very kindly. When we came first a Land they made a doleful noise, laying their faces to the ground, scratching the earth with their nails. We did think they had been at their Idolatry. When they had ended their Ceremonies, they went into their houses and brought out mats and laid upon the ground: the chiefest of them sat all in a rank; the meanest sort brought us such dainties as they had, and of their bread which they make of their Maize or Gennea [Guinea] wheat. They would

not suffer us to eat unless we sat down, which we did on a Mat right against them. After we were well satisfied they gave us of their Tobacco, which they took in a pipe made artificially of earth as ours are, but far bigger, with the bowl fashioned together with a piece of fine copper. After they had feasted us, they showed us, in welcome, their manner of dancing, which was in this fashion. One of the Savages standing in the midst singing, beating one hand against another, all the rest dancing about him, shouting, howling, and stamping against the ground, with many Antic tricks and faces, making noise like so many Wolves or Devils. . . .



Virginia, discovered and described by Captain John Smith, 1606, publ. 1624; boxed along the James River from the west (top) are Powhatan's village, Jamestown, and Points Comfort and Henry.



Virginia, 1624 detail: Cape Henry, Point Comfort, mouth of the James River (Powhatan flu), and village of Kecoughtan

MAY 1607

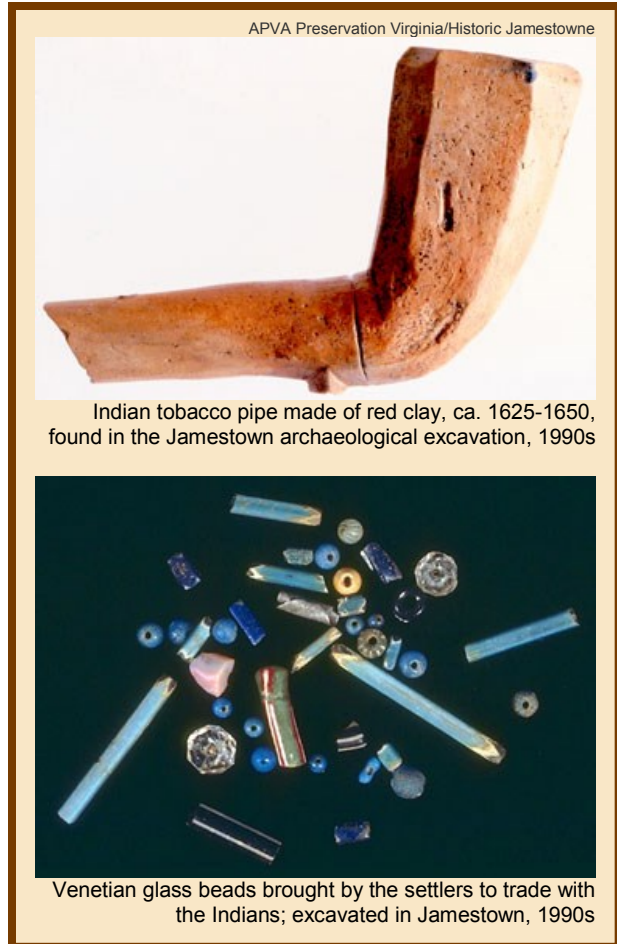
The fourth day of May, we came to the King or Werowance of Paspihe [Paspahgeh]: where they entertained us with much welcome. An old Savage made a long Oration, making a foul noise, uttering his speech with a vehement action, but we knew little what they meant. While we were in company with the Paspihes, the Werowance of Rapahanna came from the other side of the River in his Canoe. He seemed to take displeasure of our being with the Paspihes. He would fain have had us to come to his Town. The Captain was unwilling. Seeing that the day was so far spent, he returned back to his ships for that night.

The next day, being the fifth of May, the Werowance [leader] of Rapahanna sent a Messenger to have us come to him. We entertained the said Messenger, and gave him trifles which pleased him. We manned our shallop with Muskets and Targatiers sufficiently: this said Messenger guided us where our determination was to go. When we landed, the Werowance of Rapahanna came down to the water side with all his train, as goodly men as any I have seen of Savages or Christians: the Werowance coming before them playing on a Flute made of a Reed, with a Crown of Deer's hair colored red, in fashion of a Rose fastened about his knot of hair, and a great Plate of Copper on the other side of his head, with two long Feathers in fashion of a pair of Horns placed in the middle of his Crown. His body was painted all with Crimson, with a Chain of Beads about his neck, his face painted blue, besprinkled with silver Ore as we thought, his ears all behung with Bracelets of Pearl, and in either ear a Bird's Claw through it beset with fine Copper or Gold. He entertained us in so modest a proud fashion, as though he had been a Prince of civil government, holding his countenance without laughter or any such ill behavior. . . .

The eighth day of May we discovered [explored] up the River. We landed in the Country of Apamatica. At our landing, there came many stout and able Savages to resist us with their Bows and Arrows, in a most warlike manner, with the swords at their backs beset with sharp stones, and pieces of iron able to cleave a man in sunder. Among the rest one of the chiefest, standing before them cross-legged, with his Arrow ready in his Bow in one hand, and taking a Pipe of Tobacco in the other, with a bold uttering of his speech, demanded of us our being there, willing us to be gone. We made signs of peace, which they perceived in the end, and let us land in quietness. . . .

The thirteenth day, we came to our seating place [Jamestown] in Paspahas Country, some eight miles from the point of Land, which I made mention before: where our ships do lie so near the shore that they are moored to the Trees in six fathom water.

The fourteenth day, we landed all our men, which were set to work about the fortification, and others some to watch and ward as it was convenient. The first night of our landing, about midnight, there came some Savages sailing close to our quarter. Presently there was an alarm given; upon that the Savages ran away, and we [were] not troubled any more by them that night. Not long after there came two Savages



that seemed to be Commanders, bravely dressed, with Crowns of colored hair upon their heads, he came as Messengers from the Werowance of Paspiahae, telling us that their Werowance was coming and would be merry with us with a fat Deer.

The eighteenth day, the Werowance of Paspiahae came himself to our quarter, with one hundred Savages armed, who guarded him in a very warlike manner with Bows and Arrows, thinking at that time to execute their villainy. Paspiahae made great signs to us to lay our Arms away. But we would not trust him so far. He seeing he could not have convenient time to work his will, at length made signs that he would give us as much land as we would desire to take. As the Savages were in a throng in the Fort, one of them stole a Hatchet from one of our company, which spied him doing the deed: whereupon he took it from him by force, and also struck him over the arm. Presently another Savage seeing that, came fiercely at our man with a wooden sword, thinking to beat out his brains. The Werowance of Paspiahae saw us take to our Arms, went suddenly away with all his company in great anger. . . .

The twentieth day of Werowance of Paspiahae sent forty of his men with a Deer, to our quarter: but they came more in villainy than any love they bare us. They faine would have lain in our Fort all night, but we would not suffer them for fear of their treachery. . . .

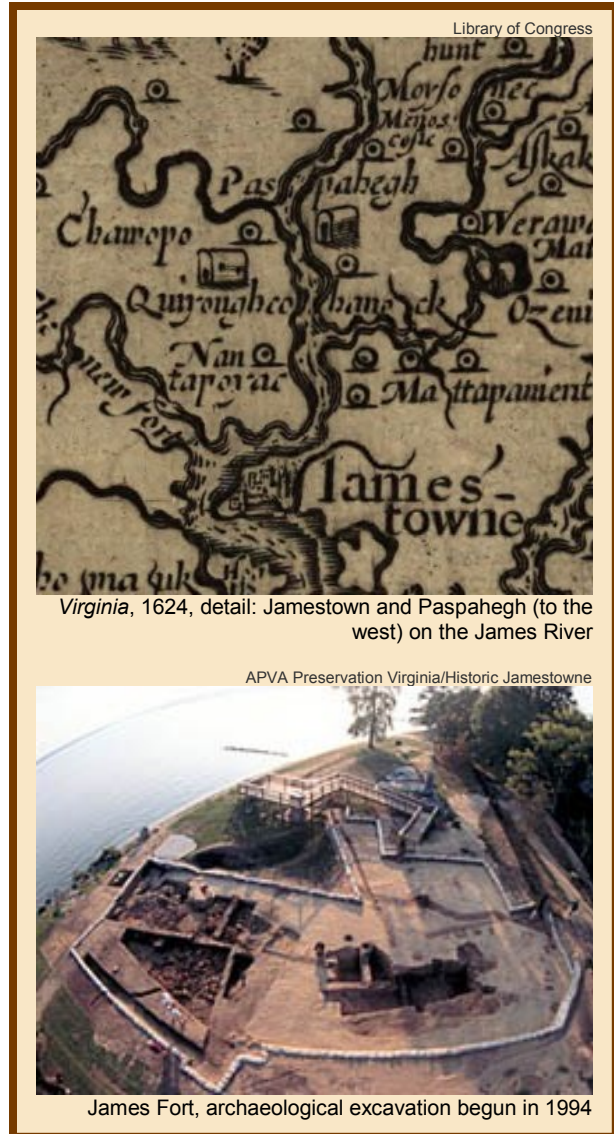
At Port Cotage in our Voyage up the River, we saw a Savage Boy about the age of ten years, who had a head of hair of a perfect yellow and a reasonable white skin, which is a Miracle among all Savages¹. . . .

The four and twentieth day we set up a Cross at the head of this River, naming it Kings River, where we proclaimed James King of England to have the most right to it. When we had finished and set up our Cross, we shipped our men and made for James Fort. By the way, we came to Pohatan's Towre [*sic*], where the Captain went on shore suffering none to go with him. He presented the Commander of this place, with a Hatchet which he took joyfully, and was well pleased.

But yet the Savages murmured at our planting in the Country, whereupon this Werowance made answer again very wisely of a Savage, Why should you be offended with them as long as they hurt you not, nor take any thing away by force. They take but a little waste ground, which does you nor any of us any good.

I saw Bread made by their women, which do all their drudgery. The men take their pleasure in hunting and their wars, which they are in continually, one Kingdom against another. . . .

¹ Tyler writes that this person was "possibly a descendant of the lost colony of Roanoke. On the theory, not generally agreed to, that that colony was not wholly destroyed, and that descendants of some of its members are still to be found in North Carolina." Tyler, *Narratives*, 17.



JUNE - JULY 1607

The fifteenth of June we had built and finished our Fort, which was trianglewise, having three Bulwarks, at every corner, like a half Moon, and four or five pieces of Artillery mounted in them. We had made ourselves sufficiently strong for these Savages. We had also sown most of our Corn on two Mountains [slight elevations]. It sprang a man's height from the ground. This Country is a fruitful soil, bearing many goodly and fruitful Trees, as Mulberries, Cherries, Walnuts, Cedars, Cypress, Sassafras, and Vines in great abundance.

Monday the two and twentieth of June, in the morning, Captain Newport in the *Admiral* departed from James Port for England.

Captain Newport being gone for England, leaving us (one hundred and four persons) very bare and scanty of victuals, furthermore in wars and in danger of the Savages, we hoped after a supply which Captain Newport promised within twenty weeks. But if the beginners of this action do carefully further us, the Country being so fruitful, it would be as great a profit to the Realm of England, as the Indies to the King of Spain. If this River which we have found had been discovered in the time of war with Spain, it would have been a commodity to our Realm, and a great annoyance to our enemies.

The seven and twentieth of July, the King of Rappahanna demanded a Canoe, which was restored, lifted up his hand to the Sun (which they worship as their God), besides he laid his hand on his heart, that he would be our special friend. It is a general rule of these people, when they swear by their God which is the Sun, no Christian will keep their Oath better upon this promise. . . .

AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 1607

The sixth of August there died John Asbie of the bloody Flux [dysentery]. The ninth day died George Flower of the swelling. The tenth day died William Bruster, Gentleman, of a wound given by the Savages, and was buried the eleventh day.

The fourteenth day, Jerome Alicock, Ancient, died of a wound, the same day, Francis Midwinter, Edward Moris, Corporall, died suddenly.

The fifteenth day, there died Edward Brown and Stephen Galthorpe. The sixteenth day, there died Thomas Gower, Gentleman. The seventeenth day, there died Thomas Mounslic. The eighteenth day, there died Robert Pennington, and John Martin, Gentleman. The nineteenth day, died Drue Pigasse, Gentleman. The two and twentieth day of August, there died Captain Bartholomew Gosnold, one of our Council: he was honorably buried, having all the Ordnance in the Fort shot off, with many volleys of small shot.

After Captain Gosnold's death, the Council could hardly agree by the dissension of Captain Kendall, which afterward was committed about heinous matters which was proved against him.

The four and twentieth day, died Edward Harrington and George Walker, and were buried the same day. The six and twentieth day, died Kenelme Throgmortin. The seven and twentieth day died William Roods. The eight and twentieth day died Thomas Stoodie, Cape Merchant.

The fourth day of September died Thomas Jacob Sergeant. The fifth day, there died Benjamin Beast. Our men were destroyed with cruel diseases, as Swellings, Fluxes, Burning Fevers, and by wars, and some departed suddenly, but for the most part they died of mere famine. There were never Englishmen left in a foreign Country in such misery as we were in this new discovered Virginia. We watched every three nights, lying on the bare cold ground, what weather soever came [and] warded all the next day, which brought our men to be most feeble wretches. Our food was but a small Can of Barley sod in water, to five men a day, our drink cold water taken out of the River, which was at a flood very salty, at a low tide full of slime and filth, which was the destruction of many of our men. Thus we lived for the space of five months in this miserable distress, not having five able men to man our Bulwarks upon any occasion. If it had not pleased God to have put a terror in the Savages' hearts, we had all perished by those wild and cruel Pagans, being in that weak estate as we were; our men night and day groaning in every corner of the

Fort most pitiful to hear. If there were any conscience in men, it would make their hearts to bleed to hear the pitiful murmurings and outcries of our sick men without relief, every night and day, for the space of six weeks, some departing out of the World, many times three or four in a night; in the morning, their bodies trailed out of their Cabins like Dogs to be buried. In this sort did I see the mortality of diverse of our people.

It pleased God, after a while, to send those people which were our mortal enemies to relieve us with victuals, as Bread, Corn, Fish, and Flesh in great plenty, which was the setting up of our feeble men, otherwise we had all perished. Also we were frequented by diverse Kings in the Country, bringing us store of provision to our great comfort.

The eleventh day, there was certain articles laid against Master Wingfield which was then President; thereupon he was not only displaced out of his President ship, but also from being of the Council. Afterwards Captain John Ratcliffe was chosen President.

The eighteenth day, died one Ellis Kinistone, which was starved to death with cold. The same day at night, died one Richard Simmons. The nineteenth day, there died one Thomas Mouton.

The rest is omitted, being more fully set down in Cap. Smith's Relations. [Sidenote by Samuel Purchas, who published Percy's *Observations* in 1625. The original of Percy's text is lost.]

In January 1608 Captain Newport returned with supplies and 100 new settlers.
Of the original 140 men, only 38 were still alive.

