

# JAMESTOWN

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



### Why is Jamestown important?

Jamestown was the first permanent English settlement in North America. It is America's birthplace.

### Who were the first Europeans to explore Virginia?

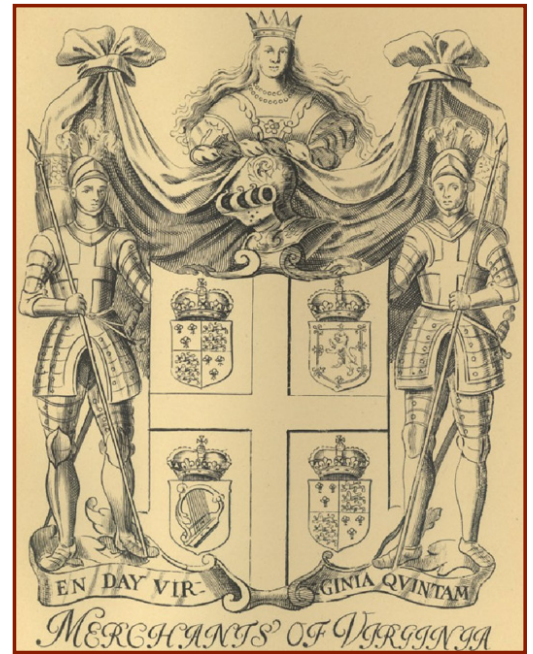
The earliest European visitor to the Chesapeake Bay is believed to have been Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazano who probably sailed past the Virginia Capes in 1524. By 1560 English and Spanish explorers probably had visited the area also. About 1570, Spanish Jesuits established a mission on the York River. English colonists at Roanoke in the 1580s entered and explored the region. Bartholomew Gosnold, captain of the *Godspeed*, had been to the North American coast on a prior voyage in 1602.

### Who established the Jamestown Colony?

In April 1606 King James I of England granted the Virginia Company a charter to establish colonies in Virginia. The Virginia Company was a private stock holding company. The charter named two branches of the company, the Virginia Company of London and the Virginia Company of Plymouth. The Virginia Company of London established the colony at Jamestown.

### When was Jamestown established?

The colonists arrived at Jamestown on May 13, 1607.



### When did the voyage to Jamestown begin and how long did it take?

Three ships left London on December 20, 1606. The ships sighted the land of Virginia and landed at Cape Henry (Virginia Beach today) on April 26, 1607. The voyage lasted 144 days, approximately four and a half months.

### Why did the voyage take so long?

The ships used an established southerly route in order to catch favorable trade winds and ocean currents, as well as to make re-provisioning stops in the Canary Islands and the Caribbean. After spending six weeks in the "Downs" in the English Channel waiting for winds, the ships headed south along the coast of Europe and North Africa, stopping at the Canary Islands. They then turned west to the Caribbean, making several stops. Finally, the ships sailed north, parallel to the coast of North America, ending in Virginia. The entire trip was more than 6,000 miles.

## Why did the Virginia Company of London establish the colony?

The Virginia Company was in search of economic opportunity. They expected to profit from mineral wealth such as gold and iron ore, timber and wood products and other natural resources. They also hoped to find a Northwest Passage or sailing route to the Orient for trade.

Other motives, as expressed by the Virginia Company's first charter, were to prevent the spread of Spanish colonies, to spread Protestant Christianity (and limit Spanish Catholicism), and to convert the Virginia Indians. The Company also issued instructions that the settlers search for the Roanoke colonists, who had disappeared some 17 years earlier.



## Why did the colonists choose the site they did for the Jamestown colony?

The Virginia Company's instructions indicated the colonists were to locate upriver "100 miles", on a river with a northwest orientation so the colonists could search for a Northwest Passage. Jamestown Island met these criteria and had a deep water port, so the colonists could moor their ships to the trees in six fathoms (36 feet) of water. The site also was chosen as a defensive position. It was surrounded on three sides by water and on a fourth by swamp. The fort was located at a bend in the river, which provided a wide field of view.

## What were the boundaries of the land granted to the Virginia Company?

The charters granted to the Virginia Company stipulated its rights and boundaries in North America. The charter of 1606 gave the Company rights to the area of the North American Atlantic coast between 34 and 41 degrees latitude; fifty miles inland and all islands up to one hundred miles out to sea. The 1609 charter extended Virginia's boundaries to 200 miles north and south of Jamestown and from sea to sea. In a 1612 revision of the charter, the sea borders were expanded to include Bermuda.



## Who were the native Indians that the English encountered at Jamestown?

The native Indians in Virginia were the Powhatan Indians, a group of approximately 32 Algonquian-speaking tribes who lived in the Virginia coastal plain.

## What did the Powhatan Indians call their home and who was their leader?

The Powhatan Indians called the area "Tsenacommacah" which means "densely inhabited area". The paramount chief of the Powhatan chiefdom was Wahunsonacock. The English called him "Powhatan".

## How many Powhatan Indians lived in Virginia when the Jamestown Colonists arrived?

Historians estimate more than 14,000 Powhatan Indians lived in Virginia at the time of contact.





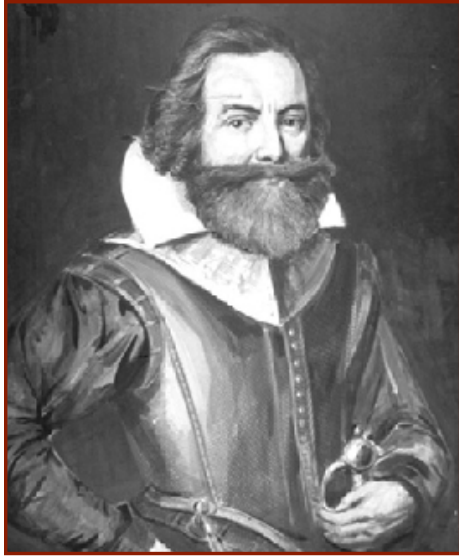
## What were the major difficulties the early colonists faced?

Food shortages, disease and illness, establishing relations with the native Powhatan Indians and the lack of skilled labor were the primary problems the early settlers faced.

## How many colonists died in the first year?

After 8 months in Virginia, only 38 of the original 104 were alive when the first supply ship arrived in January 1608. Historians have estimated that one out of six new settlers died before the end of their first year.

## What were the first trades practiced at Jamestown?



Four carpenters, two bricklayers, a mason, and a blacksmith were the first tradesmen, arriving with the first settlers in 1607. These were the trades needed to build houses and other structures. Also aboard was a tailor, one barber and two surgeons. Later tradesmen had skills that the Virginia Company hoped would help earn a profit—a jeweler, refiners, goldsmiths, and a perfumer. Other early trades included apothecaries and a cooper.

## What products and resources did the Virginia colony export to England?

One of the first materials exported was wood for ship construction, furniture, houses, clapboard, wainscot, pikes, etc. Other wood products included potash, pitch, and tar. Tobacco soon became the most important export.

## What was John Smith's role at Jamestown?

John Smith was one of the first seven members of the Council, the governing body in Virginia appointed by the Virginia Company. From September 1608 to September 1609, he was the President of the Council. He also served as

Cape Merchant (supply officer), obtaining food from the Indians through trade, diplomacy or intimidation. Smith explored the Chesapeake Bay and made maps of the area. After returning to England in 1609, he wrote and published extensive accounts of his experiences in Virginia.

## When did the first English women arrive at Jamestown?

The first two women arrived in October 1608. They were Mistress Forrest and her maid, Ann Buras. Most women who followed came to be with their husbands, or to serve as personal servants to other women. In 1620, approximately 90 women arrived to supplement those already in the colony and to serve as wives for the planters. About 50 more would arrive in 1621.

## When did the first Africans arrive in Virginia?

The first recorded arrival of Africans was in August 1619. A privateering ship, the White Lion, arrived at Point Comfort carrying 20 or more Africans. They were sold to Governor George Yeardley and the cape merchant, who probably gave them the status of servants.

## When was the first church service at Jamestown?

Reverend Robert Hunt held the first Anglican Communion in Jamestown under a sail used for protection on June 21, 1607.

## When and where did Virginia's first representative assembly meet?

The first representative assembly in English America met July 30-August 2, 1619 in the church at Jamestown.





## **When did the capital of Virginia move from Jamestown?**

Virginia's general assembly met at Middle Plantation (Williamsburg) and decided to make it the new capital in 1699.

## **By how many years does Jamestown, Virginia predate the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, Massachusetts?**

Jamestown was established in 1607, 13 years earlier than Plymouth. The Pilgrims landed at Plymouth to establish a colony in "Northern Virginia" in December 1620. By this time, tobacco was Virginia's cash crop, the first Africans had arrived and representative government had been established in Virginia.

*Historical background materials made possible by Archibald Andrews Marks.*



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