

II. Virginia

A. The London Company of Virginia

1. In 1606, the new English king, James I, gave special permission (called a “charter”) to two English companies to try to establish colonies in America.
2. The Virginia Company of Plymouth was to create colonies in the area of present-day Massachusetts. Its attempted Popham colony of 1607 failed.
3. The Virginia Company of London was to create colonies in the area of modern-day Virginia.
4. Up to this point there had been multiple failed attempts at colonization. Now, on this latest voyage, sixteen of the hundred colonists died before ever reaching Virginia. If the challenges were so great, how would they succeed?

B. The Establishment of Jamestown (1607)

1. When the colonists first arrived, the English were attacked by an Indian tribe called the Chesapeakes.
2. In order to be able to defend themselves against further attacks, the settlers chose an island in the James River, only connected to the land by a small isthmus, as the site for their fort.
3. When they encountered the Indian tribe called the Paspaheghs, they could not communicate, and they almost fought again.
4. The site was chosen for defense, but there was no fresh water at that spot and many mosquitoes during the summer (which carried the disease Malaria.)

C. Captain Smith Helps Save the Colony

1. Because too many of the colonists sought to find gold instead of growing food, they started to run out of their food stores.
2. Captain John Smith sailed up river to meet with the Indian tribes in the area, learn their language, and obtain food.
3. On one voyage to meet with the Indians, Smith was captured by the Pawmunkey tribe, and brought before the leader of the Powhatan tribe and of all the Indians in the area, chief Powhatan.
4. Powhatan decided to execute Smith, but Powhatan’s daughter Pocahontas threw herself down over Smith’s body and begged for his life to be spared.
5. Upon returning to colony, Smith took over and forced the colonists to live by a basic rule: “he that does not work, shall not eat!” (Looking for gold did not count as “work.”)
6. Thanks to Smith’s efforts fewer colonists died, but the colony might still have failed if not for the regular arrival of new supply ships that brought more food and colonists.
7. By 1609, 500 colonists had come to Jamestown, but only 60 had survived!

D. The Success of Jamestown

1. In 1613, a colonist named John Rolfe learned how to grow Caribbean tobacco in Virginia.
2. This was a product that Englishmen had been buying from Spain, but which they preferred to buy from an English colony.
3. Soon most of the Jamestown settlers were farming tobacco for sale in England.

4. To get more settlers to come, the London Company offered a “headright” (50 acres of land total) for each person that left England and settled in America.
5. Those who could not afford the passage could have their way paid by someone else and become an “indentured servant” for five to seven years. After being a servant, they would get their own land, and a year’s supply of food.
6. By 1619 the colony was so successful that the colonists organized their own government, called the “House of Burgesses.”

E. The Birth of the American Dream

1. As we study the colonial period, our main goal is to find the roots of what would become the United States of America. Although much of life in colonial America was the same as it was back in Europe, certain things were new, and among the greatest was the *freedom of opportunity*. As hard as life was in the wilderness of the colonies, those who succeeded through their hard work, were able to earn a quality of life they could never have hoped for in Europe.
2. In 1657, a boy named John Washington arrived in Virginia as a mate on a ship. He decided to stay, and earned a headright. Over the course of his life, he earned over 5000 acres in headrights. He was the great-grandfather of George Washington (America’s first president.)