

# SECTION 3

## Early British Colonies

### MAIN IDEA

Beginning in the early 1600s, the English established colonies along the eastern shore of North America.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The original 13 English colonies in North America formed the foundation of what would become the United States of America.

### Terms & Names

- John Smith
- Jamestown
- joint-stock companies
- indentured servant
- Puritan
- John Winthrop
- King Philip's War
- William Penn
- Quaker
- mercantilism
- Navigation Acts

### One European's Story

**John Smith** craved adventure. Smith's father had urged him to be a merchant, but the restless Englishman wanted to see the world. In 1606, he offered his services as a colonist to the Virginia Company, a group of merchants charged with starting an English colony in North America. He later recalled his vision of the opportunities that awaited those who settled the Americas.

#### A PERSONAL VOICE JOHN SMITH

"What man who is poor or who has only his merit to advance his fortunes can desire more contentment than to walk over and plant the land he has obtained by risking his life? . . . Here nature and liberty . . . give us freely that which we lack or have to pay dearly for in England. . . . What pleasure can be greater than to grow tired from . . . planting vines, fruits, or vegetables? . . ."

—*The General History of Virginia*

▲ John Smith, seen here in a 19th-century painting based on a 1616 engraving, was a self-proclaimed soldier of fortune, sea captain, and poet.

Smith would need all of his abilities to steer the new colony, Jamestown, through what turned out to be a disastrous beginning. In time, however, the colony survived to become England's first permanent settlement in North America.

### The English Settle at Jamestown

In April of 1607, nearly four months after the Virginia Company's three ships had left England, they reached the North American shore. Sailing part way up a broad river leading into Chesapeake Bay, the colonists selected a small, defensible peninsula and built Fort James to protect the settlement of **Jamestown**, named for their king.

**A DISASTROUS START** Unlike Spanish colonies, which were funded by Spanish rulers, the English colonies were originally funded by **joint-stock companies**. Stock companies allowed several investors to pool their wealth in support of a colony that would, they hoped, yield a profit. Investors in the Jamestown colony demanded a quick return on their investment, and the colonists hoped to find gold to satisfy them. Consequently, they neglected farming and soon



## Rediscovering Fort James

### INTERACTIVE

Erosion turned the Jamestown Peninsula into an island and, for many years, the site of the original Fort James was assumed to be under water. However, in 1996, archaeologists from the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities discovered artifacts on what they concluded was the original site of the fort.

Since then, archaeologists have discovered armor, weapons, even games used by the first colonists. Archaeologists and historians are constantly learning more and more about this long-buried treasure of American history.

16th-century helmet and breastplate. ►



► An archaeologist kneels beside holes left from the original palisade fence of Fort James. Note that the palisades were less than one foot in width.

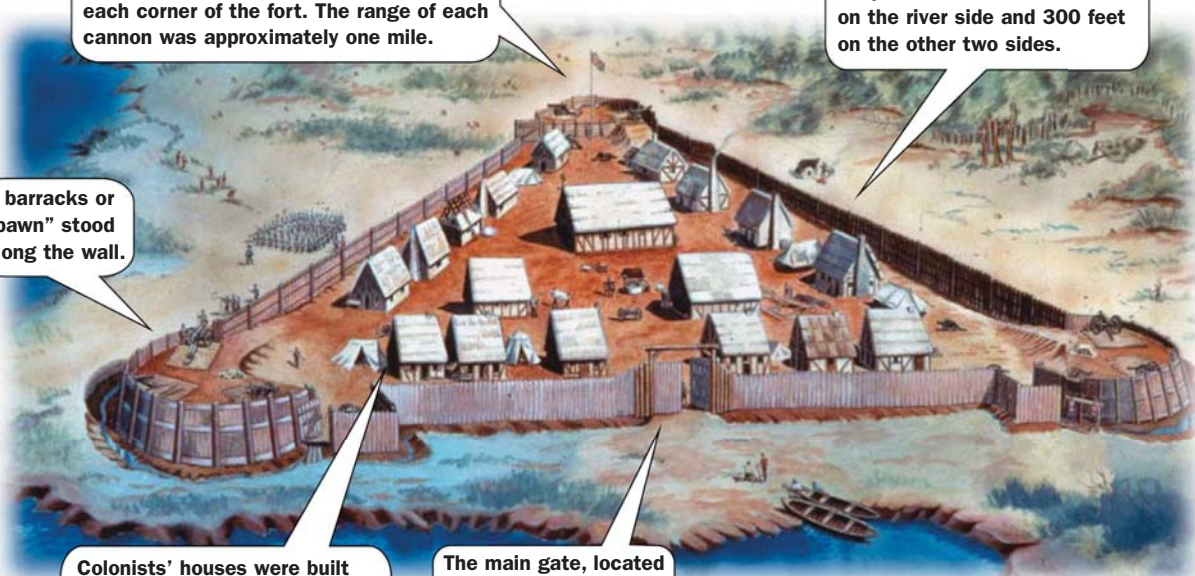
Rounded bulwarks, or watch towers, mounted with cannon were located at each corner of the fort. The range of each cannon was approximately one mile.

The walls of the triangular-shaped fort measured 420 feet on the river side and 300 feet on the other two sides.

A barracks or "bawn" stood along the wall.

Colonists' houses were built about ten feet from the fort's walls. Houses measured sixteen by forty feet and several colonists lived in each.

The main gate, located on the long side, faced the James river.



► This illustration re-creates what historians and archaeologists now believe Fort James looked like early in its history.

## MAIN IDEA

### Analyzing Causes

**A** Why was the early settlement at Jamestown a near disaster?

suffered the consequences. Disease from contaminated river water struck them first, followed soon by hunger. After several months, one settler described the terrifying predicament: “Thus we lived for the space of five months in this miserable distress, . . . our men night and day groaning in every corner of the fort, most pitiful to hear.” **A**

Smith held the colony together by forcing the colonists to farm and by securing food and support from the native Powhatan peoples. Then Smith was injured and returned to England. Without Smith’s leadership, the colony eventually deteriorated to the point of famine. The settlement was saved, however, by the arrival of new colonists and by the development of a highly profitable crop, tobacco.

**TOBACCO REQUIRES A SUPPLY OF LABOR** In order to grow tobacco, the Virginia Company needed field laborers. Immigration jumped in 1618, when the company introduced the headright system, offering 50 acres of land to “adventurers” who would pay their own or another’s transportation from England. Many of those who arrived in Virginia, however, came as **indentured servants**. In exchange for passage to North America and food and shelter upon arrival, an indentured servant agreed to a limited term of servitude—usually four to seven years. Indentured servants were mainly from the lower classes of English society and therefore had little to lose by leaving for a new world.

The first enslaved Africans arrived in Virginia aboard a Dutch merchant ship in 1619. After a few years, most of them received land and freedom. It would be several decades before the English colonists in North America began the systematic use of enslaved Africans as laborers.

**COLONISTS CLASH WITH NATIVE AMERICANS** The colonists’ desire for more land—to accommodate their growing population and the demand for more crop space—led to warfare with the original inhabitants of Virginia. Unlike the Spanish, the English followed a pattern of driving away the people they defeated. Their conquest over the native peoples was total and complete, which is one reason a large mestizo-like population never developed in the United States.

**ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES SPLIT VIRGINIA** The English colonists who migrated to North America in increasing numbers battled not only Native Americans but sometimes each other. By the 1670s, one-quarter of the free white men in Virginia were poor former indentured servants who lived mainly on the western frontier of Virginia, where they constantly fought with Native Americans for land.

Although Virginia’s governor, William Berkeley, proposed building forts to protect the settlers, the settlers refused to pay taxes to maintain these forts. The colonists, under the leadership of a young planter named Nathaniel Bacon, marched on Jamestown in September of 1676. Bacon confronted colonial leaders with a number of grievances, including the frontier’s lack of representation in Virginia’s colonial legislature, or law-making body, the House of Burgesses. Although Bacon’s Rebellion ultimately failed, it exposed the restlessness of the colony’s former indentured servants. **B**

## MAIN IDEA

### Analyzing Issues

**B** Why were Virginia’s frontier settlers frustrated with their government?

## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

### EARLY REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

As the English settlers colonized North America, they sowed the seeds of the representative style of government that would become the foundation of American democracy.

Virginia’s House of Burgesses served as the first representative body in colonial America. The House first met in Jamestown in 1619 and included two citizens, or burgesses, from each of Virginia’s eleven districts. The body claimed the authority to raise taxes and pass legislation—subject to veto by the English governor.

The Mayflower Compact, which the Pilgrims crafted as they sailed to North America in 1620, created a civil government and pledged loyalty to the king. It stated that the purpose of their government in America would be to frame “just and equal laws . . . for the general good of the colony.”

Created in 1639, the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut extended voting rights to a greater number of white males in that colony. It also declared that the colonial legislature could assemble without a call by the governor.