

Jamestown Narratives

Eyewitness Accounts of
the Virginia Colony

The First Decade:
1607-1617

Edited by
EDWARD WRIGHT HAILE

ROUNDHOUSE
Champlain, Virginia

4. Gabriel Archer

A Brief Description of the People

< Public Records Office: Colonial Office 1/1-55, American Antiquarian 1860d:63, Barbour 1969:102

A brilliant account, full of freshness and insight, tragically brief. At this time no Englishman had met Powhatan.

Different east/west moral attitudes in regard to thievery led to no end of trouble in the years to come. Englishmen condemned thievery in all cases: The thief was punished and goods were restored. Indians, not without exception, felt that while one certainly had a right to claim and defend belongings, once they were stolen possession was, so to speak, nine-tenths of the law. The modern attitude conforms to the English. The Indian attitude has the virtue of consistency in the morality of individuals and nation states.

THERE IS A KING in this land called Great Pawatah, under whose dominions are at least 20ty several kingdoms, yet each king potent as a prince in his own territory. These have their subjects at so quick command as a beck brings obedience, even to the restitution of stolen goods, which by their natural inclination they are loth to leave.

They go all naked save their privities, yet in cool weather they wear deerskins with the hair on loose. Some have leather stockings up to their twists,¹ and sandals on their feet.

Their hair is black generally, which they wear long on the left side, tied up on a knot, about which knot the kings and best among them have a kind of coronet of deer's hair colored red. Some have chains of long link'd copper about their necks, and some chains of pearl. The common sort stick long feathers in this knot. I found not a gray eye among them all. Their skin is tawny, not so born but with dyeing and painting themselves, in which they delight greatly.

The women are like the men, only this difference: Their hair groweth long all over their heads, save clip'd somewhat short afore. These do all the labor, and the men hunt and go at their pleasure.

They live commonly by the waterside in little cottages made of canes and reeds, covered with the bark of trees. They dwell as I guess by families of kindred and alliance, some 40ty or 50ty in a *hatho*, or small village, which towns are not past a mile or half a mile asunder in most places.

They live upon sodden wheat, beans, and peas for the most part. Also they kill deer, take fish in their weirs, and kill fowl abundance. They eat often and that liberally.

They are proper lusty, straight men, very strong, run exceeding swiftly; their fight is alway in the wood with bow and arrows, and a short wooden sword. The celerity they use in skirmish is admirable. The king directs the battle and is always in front.

Their manner of entertainment is upon mats on the ground under some tree, where they sit themselves alone in the midst of the mat, and two mats on each side, on which their people sit; then right against him (making a square form) sat we always. When they came to their mat they have an usher goes before them, and the rest as he sits down give a long shout.

The people steal anything comes near them, yea, are so practiced in this art that looking in our face they would with their foot between their toes convey a chisel, knife, piercer, or any indifferent light thing; which having once conveyed, they hold it an injury to take the same from them. They are naturally given to treachery, howbeit we could not find it in our travel up the river, but rather a most kind and loving people.

They sacrifice tobacco to the sun, [a] fair picture, or a harmful thing (as a sword or piece) also; they sprinkle some into the water in the morning before they wash.

They have many wives, to whom, as near as I could perceive, they keep constant. The Great King Pawatah had most wives. These they abide not to be touch'd before their face. The great disease¹ reigns in the men generally—full fraught with nodes, botches, and palpable

appearances in their foreheads: We found above a hundred.

The women are very cleanly in making their bread and preparing meat.

I found they account after death to go into another world, pointing eastward to the element. And when they saw us at prayer they observed us with great silence and respect, especially those to whom I had imparted the meaning of our reverence.

To conclude, they are a very witty¹ and ingenious people, apt both to understand and speak our language, so that I hope in God, as He hath miraculously preserved us hither from all dangers, both of sea and land and their fury, so He will make us authors of His holy will in converting them to our true Christian faith by His own inspiring grace and knowledge of His deity.

5. The Council in Virginia

Letter to the Council of Virginia, 22 June 1607

< Northumberland Papers: Alnwick MSS, volume 7, Brown 1890: 106, Barbour 1969:78

Virginia's first report to London lays bare the perennial problem: Of six major tasks in seven weeks, only three ensure comfort and survival. Furthermore, the sailors are already at work "defrauding" the colonists.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE ourselves accountable for our time here spent, were it but to give you satisfaction of our industries and affections to this most honorable action, and the better to quicken those good spirits which have already bestowed themselves here, and to put life into such dead understandings or beliefs that must first see and feel the womb of our labor and this land before they will entertain any good hope of us or of the land:

Within less than seven weeks, we are fortified well against the Indians; we have sown good store of wheat; we have sent you a taste of clapboard; we have built some houses; we have spared some hands to a discovery; and still as God shall enable us with strength we will better and better our proceedings.

Our easiest and richest commodity being sasafrax, roots were gathered up by the sailors with loss and spoil of many of our tools, and with drawing of our men from our labor to their uses against our knowledge to our prejudice. We earnestly entreat you—and do trust—that you take such order as we be not in this thus defrauded, since they be all our waged men. Yet do we wish that they be reasonably dealt withal, so as all the loss neither fall on us nor them. I believe they have thereof two tons at the least which, if they scatter abroad at their pleasure, will pull down our price for a long time. This we leave to your wisdoms.

The land would flow with milk and honey if so seconded by your careful wisdoms and bountiful hands. We do not persuade to shoot one arrow to seek another, but to find them both. And we doubt not but to send them home with golden heads. At least our desires, labors, and lives shall to that engage themselves.

We are set down 80 miles within a river for breadth, sweetness of water, length navigable up into the country, deep and bold channel so stored with sturgeon and other sweet fish as no man's fortune hath ever possessed the like and, as we think, if more may be wished in a river it will be found. The soil [is] most fruitful, laden with good oak, ash, walnut tree, poplar, pine, sweet woods, cedar, and others yet without names that yield gums pleasant as frankincense and expenced amongst us for great virtue in healing green wounds and aches.

We entreat your succors for our seconds with all expedition lest