

POWHATAN INDIAN WORLD

Introduction



Werowan or great Lord of Virginia, Theodor de Bry, 1590

Archaeologists believe the American Indians were the first people to arrive in North America, perhaps having migrated from Asia more than 16,000 years ago. During this Paleo time period, these Indians rapidly spread throughout America and were the first people to live in Virginia. During the Woodland period, which began around 1200 B.C., Indian culture reached its highest level of complexity. By the late 16th century, Indian people in Coastal Plain Virginia, united under the leadership of Wahunsonacock, had organized themselves into approximately 32 tribes. Wahunsonacock was the paramount or supreme chief, having held the title “Powhatan.” Not a personal name, the Powhatan title was used by English settlers to identify both the leader of the tribes and the people of the paramount chiefdom he ruled. Although the

Powhatan people lived in separate towns and tribes, each led by its own chief, their language, social structure, religious beliefs and cultural traditions were shared. By the time the first English settlers set foot in “Tsenacommacah, or “densely inhabited land,” the Powhatan Indians had developed a complex culture with a centralized political system.

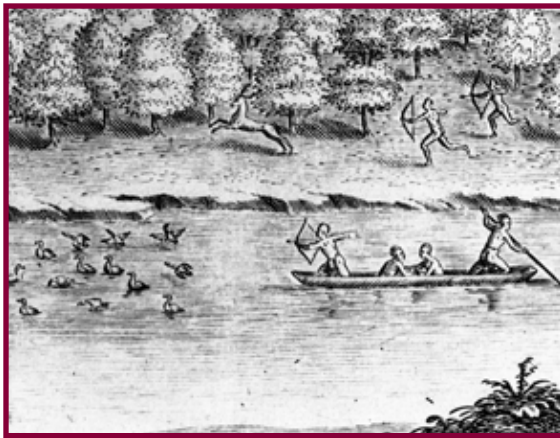
Powhatan Indian World is a story of the Powhatan people who lived in early 17th-century Virginia—their social, political, economic structures and everyday life ways. It is the story of individuals, cultural interactions, events and consequences that frequently challenged the survival of the Powhatan people. It is the story of how a unique culture, through strong kinship networks and tradition, has endured and maintained tribal identities in Virginia right up to the present day.

Where did the Powhatan Indians live?

When the humans who crossed the Bering Straits at the end of the last great Ice Age first arrived on the Virginia landscape, the environment was vastly different than today. Although the regions comprising the Blue Ridge Mountains, Piedmont, Ridge and Valley, and Coastal Plain were in place, the effects of the glaciers to the north caused long, hard winters and short, cool summers. As Virginia’s climate changed to a warmer, drier one and sea level rose, open grassland gave way to a rich floodplain with woods of pine and oak, and vegetation became profuse. The floodplain that developed on Virginia’s Coastal Plain contained numerous environmental zones that produced a variety of marine, fresh water and terrestrial life. The mixed forest zone in particular provided the greatest variety and abundance of plant and animal life. It was rich in nuts and berries, gave access to fish and shellfish, and provided an abundance of animals and birds including white-tailed deer, turkey, ducks, opossum, raccoon, black bear, river otters, skunks, red and gray foxes, civet cats and wolves. Many plants and roots were available for gathering, and the rich soil made the eventual cultivation of crops possible.



John Smith’s Map of Virginia, 1633 printing



Virginia hunting scene, Theodor de Bry, 1590

A typical Powhatan “town”, as the English called them, lay along a stream or river in a cleared area of deciduous forested land in Virginia’s Coastal Plain. Immediately surrounding the settlement were cultivated fields, dotted haphazardly with tree stumps burned to create the fields. Just beyond the fields lay a variety of environments used by the people. The forest provided game and plants to gather for food, trees to cut for housing and tool production and roots for medicines. Nearby marshes provided reeds to weave into mats and tuckahoe tubers to gather for food. The streams and rivers provided fresh water fish upriver beyond the salt-water zone and marine and shellfish down river. Rivers and ponds also provided a habitat for wild birds and aquatic plants.

In the late 16th century, the inhabitants of Virginia lived along waterways which also provided their main form of transportation. The Chesapeake Bay, created when warming caused sea levels to rise, was really the valley of the Susquehanna River flowing down from the north, which was flooded by the rising ocean. This valley, now the Bay, is fed by tributaries which lie in the Virginia Coastal Plain—the Potomac, Rappahannock, York and James Rivers. These tributaries are actually tidal estuaries; they consist of freshwater flowing downstream and meeting with saltwater from the ocean.



Their manner of fishing, Theodor de Bry, 1590



Indians conversing, Theodor de Bry, 1590

What language did the Powhatan Indians speak?

The Powhatan people spoke a very different language from the English. At the time Columbus arrived in the New World, more than 220 different languages and dialects could be found being spoken throughout the North American Indian tribal populations. The Powhatan people spoke a form of Eastern Algonquian, a family of languages used by various tribes along the Atlantic Coast from North Carolina to Canada, and had no form of written communication.

Depending upon their location on the Coastal Plain, the Powhatan groups in Virginia may have spoken a number of varying dialects of Powhatan Algonquian. Variation can be seen in the word lists compiled by some English observers. Some of their words, like moccasin and tomahack (tomahawk), are familiar to us today. Powhatan Algonquian does not survive today as a spoken language, and no one knows precisely what it sounded like.

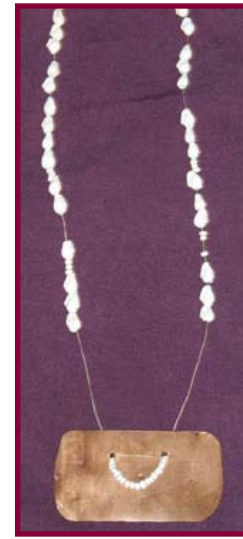
What were the social structures of the Powhatan Indians?

In 1612, John Smith recorded the following observation about how inheritance of Powhatan's paramount chiefdom was decided in Powhatan society. "His kingdom descendeth not to his sonnes nor children, but first to his brethren...and after their decease to his sisters. First to the eldest sister then to the rest and after them to the heires male and female of the eldest sister, but never to the heires of the males." Powhatan society was matrilineal, with kinship and inheritance passing through the female line. In the last quarter of the 16th century, through his mother's line, Powhatan inherited the control of six tribes in the Tidewater area of Virginia. Through intimidation or warfare, he also began consolidating others. By the time the English arrived, Powhatan loosely controlled approximately 32 tribal groups and had centrally located his headquarters at Werowocomoco on what's now the York River.



Powhatan, Detail from John Smith's Map of Virginia, 1612

The Powhatan people lived in a ranked society of rulers, great warriors, priests and commoners, with status being determined by inheritance or achievement. Chiefs inherited their positions of authority and granted positions of rank to outstanding hunters and warriors. As a result, individuals in these newly granted positions were often set up as trusted advisors or counselors and were included in elaborate feasts. Priests were men of power, often having a great influence over rulers. They wore badges of distinction, were organized into their own hierarchy and performed duties in the temples.



Reproduction Indian gorget

Larger homes, more wives, and more elaborate clothing, meals and burial customs were afforded to Powhatans of higher status. They possessed and controlled goods such as copper (made into gorgets and beads), shell beads, fresh water pearls and furs. Although political positions were inherited through women, little political authority was given to them except in the case of a female chief, or "werowansqua."

How did the Powhatan people express their religious beliefs?

Powhatan Indians worshipped a hierarchy of gods and spirits. They believed in two major gods, Ahone, the creator and giver of good things, and Oke, the evil spirit, whom they tried to appease with offerings of tobacco, beads, furs and foods. The people believed in an afterlife for important leaders; therefore, the bodies of important chiefs and priests were preserved and placed on scaffolds in the temples.

The Powhatan priesthood was divided into two classes. Priests presided over religious rituals, kept tribal history and maintained the temples. Lower-class conjurers specialized in foretelling enemy plans and curing illnesses with treatments in sweat lodges, herbal teas and chants. Religious leaders acted as advisors to tribal leaders. Priests and conjurers were distinguished by their striking appearances, painting their faces and wearing feather capes and head-dresses made of snake and weasel skins. They fastened bird claws and blackbirds to their ears.



John Smith threatened with death by the Indians, Theodor de Bry, 1634



Aged man, Theodor de Bry, 1590

What form of government did the Powhatan Indians have?

Powhatan, the supreme chief, dominated their government. All villages in the same region belonged to one tribe. Each tribe had its own chief called a werowance (male) or werowansqua (female), and villages within a tribe had their own leaders who answered to the tribal chief. Everyone paid tribute taxes to the tribal chief, in the form of skins, beads, copper, deer, turkeys and corn. These goods were stored in large temples until used by a chief or given to loyal followers or guests. John Smith noted in 1612, “the forme of their Common wealth is a monarchical government, one as Emperour ruleth over many kings or governours. Their chiefe ruler is called Powhatan...His inferiour kings whom they call werowances are tyed to rule by customs, and have power of life and death at their command.”

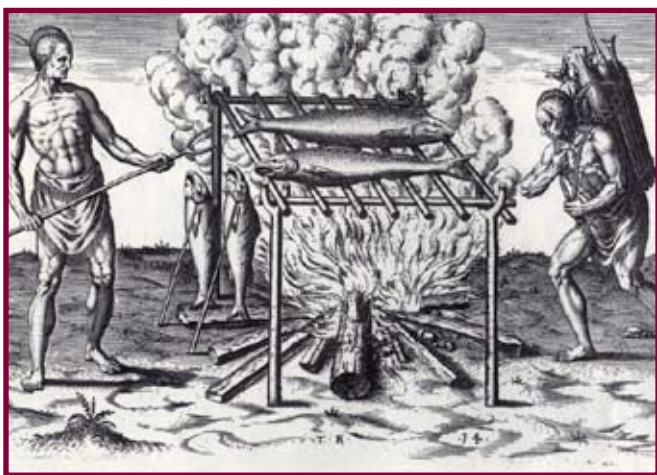
Powhatan ruled by a system of customary law, coupled with his own commands. He and his chiefs enforced their orders with the assistance of trusted priests and counselors. For those who disobeyed, punishment could be severe, such as clubbing or burning to death for theft, murder and other major offenses. Minor offenses yielded beatings and other less severe punishment. Scalping and slow death by torture were reserved for enemies and trespassers.

How did the Powhatan people acquire food?

The local environment provided the Powhatan people with their every need. They obtained about half of their food through farming, which was done in the summer months. Using a system of small mounds, women and children planted corn and bean crops, placing squash and gourds in-between. Corn, the most important crop, as well as beans and squash, were dried and preserved for later use throughout the year. Dried gourds could be used as musical instruments or for bowls, cups and scoops. To supplement their field crops, particularly in late winter and spring, they gathered fruit, nuts, grain, tubers and roots.



Their sitting at meat, Theodor de Bry, 1590



The broiling of their fish, Theodor de Bry, 1590

Alone or in small groups, hunting was the chief occupation of Powhatan men. They used bows and arrows to kill large game like the white tailed deer and captured small animals such as the beaver with traps or snares. These animals provided the people with many needed resources and materials like clothing, food and tools. It is likely that most hunting was done in the winter months when brush was sparse. Fishing was done mostly in the spring and early summer; the men caught fresh water fish, ocean fish and shellfish. They used canoes made from hollowed out cypress logs or waded in shallow water to fish. Large numbers of fish were trapped in weirs stretched across waterways.



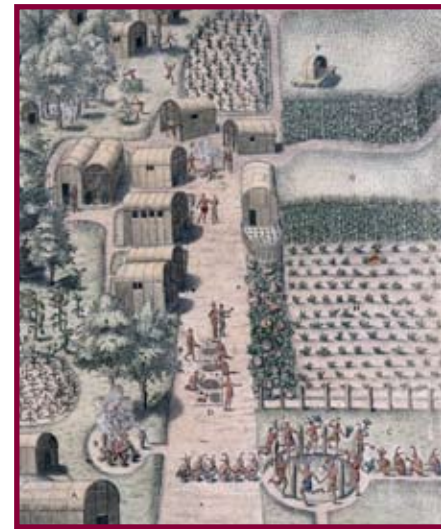
Their manner of making boats,
Theodor de Bry, 1590

How did the Powhatan people obtain things they needed?

Powhatan men and women were highly skilled at fashioning the tools they needed. Men made tools and weapons from wood, bone, shell and stone. Using a process of grinding and polishing stone, they made axes, mortars and pestles. Arrow points and tools used for cutting and scraping were shaped by knapping or flaking stone. This process involved striking one stone with another harder stone in an effort to reduce the softer stone bit-by-bit. Men crafted fish nets and fish traps from plant fibers and hollowed out large trees to make canoes. With local clays, Powhatan women made pottery vessels for cooking and storage. They also produced clothing from deer hides

and wove mats out of reeds to cover houses.

The Powhatan Indians participated in an extensive trading network featuring luxury goods. Controlled by the elite, this exclusive type of trading was used as a means to increase social status. Indians who lived upriver traded fresh water pearls for ornaments made from large marine shells collected by eastern people. Metals were scarce in Tidewater Virginia, so the Powhatans also traded for copper from groups outside the chiefdom, some of which came from as far as the Great Lakes. To the south of the chiefdom, they traded for puccoon, a red dye used to make a highly-valued paint. The arrival of the English expanded trade opportunities for the Powhatan Indians—in 1611 Sir Thomas Dale related that he hoped to establish “a trade of furs, to be obtained with the savages in the northern rivers.”



Secota, Theodor de Bry, 1590

What were Powhatan homes like?

Due to their agricultural tie to the land, the Powhatan Indians built semi-permanent “towns”, as the English called them. Most Powhatan settlements were small, with fewer than 100 people. Ten to twenty houses, called yehakins, were randomly scattered among shade trees and fields. Some yehakins were small and round, while others were oblong, with rounded ends to make them more wind resistant. Young saplings were used to create a frame for the house. The people covered their houses with bark shingles stripped from trees, or with mats woven from cut marsh reeds. In warm weather these mats could be rolled up. Natural resources provided the Indians with what was needed for their survival.



Indians hunting, Theodor de Bry, 1590

Most houses were only a single room. Furniture was limited to fur or mat-covered sleeping benches built along the walls with drying lofts above. At night, additional beds made of deerskins or reed mats were laid directly on the ground. A fire placed in the center of the room served as the main source of light and heat. A smoke hole cut in the roof directly over the fire, as well as doors, provided ventilation and additional light. Because of poor lighting, houses were mainly used for sleeping and storage.

What roles did men, women and children have in Powhatan society?

Men were hunters and warriors. They made fishing equipment, built canoes and made stone tools to supply their hunting gear. Both men and women played a role in building houses. Men gathered saplings and constructed the framework. Women made mats or gathered bark to cover the structure. Women also grew crops and cooked meals, but women and children did not always stay at home. To accomplish much of their work, such as gathering firewood, wild plant foods, reeds for mats, clay for pottery, and drawing water, they often had to leave the village.

Powhatan children learned their roles and responsibilities from tribal elders. Girls would weed gardens, pound corn and care for younger children. Boys were taught to fish and hunt. While they worked, women with babies carried them on cradle boards strapped to their backs. William Strachey wrote in 1612: "They love Children very dearely." Men and women married at puberty. A man paid a bride price to the family of his future wife as compensation for the loss of her labor. Marriage was accompanied by exchanging gifts and feasting. Men were allowed to have as many wives as they could afford.



Detail from *Susquehannock Indian*, John Smith's Map of Virginia, 1612

How did the Powhatan people look and dress?

John Smith's 1612 description of the Powhatan Indians said they were "generally tall and straight, of a comely proportion, and of a colour browne....Their haire is generally black, but few have any beards. The men weare half their heads shaven, the other halfe long.... The [women's hair] are cut in many fashions agreeable to their yeares." Powhatan men and women painted their faces with a mixture of red paint and nut oil and used bear fat to ward off winter cold and summer insects. Women tattooed their bodies with abstract designs or pictures of flowers, fruits, snakes and lizards. As a mark of status, the elite wore beaded necklaces, bracelets and earrings. Common materials used in Powhatan jewelry include shell beads, freshwater pearls, copper and animal parts, such as teeth or bones.

The Powhatan people wore little clothing. Although other types of clothing could be made, typically Powhatan men and women wore an apron of deerskin around the waist. Men wore fur cloaks, loose sleeves and leggings. Moccasins were worn on trips into the forest. Powhatan men were armed with the bow and arrow and war club.

Indian women made clothing from animal skins and other natural materials. They tanned the hides and used bone awls, bone needles and deer sinew to fasten garments together. Clothing was often decorated with fringe, beads, bones, teeth or painted designs.



Indian ceremony, Theodor de Bry, 1590

In what types of recreational activities did the Powhatan Indians participate?

Leisure activities brought Powhatan people together with games, music and dancing. Men and boys wrestled and ran foot races. Everyone participated in games, similar to soccer or field hockey [stickball]. A popular gambling game, similar to pick-up-sticks, was played with reeds.

The Powhatan Indians had songs and dances for virtually every occasion, including mourning, ceremonial feasting, war and social events. Usually men and women danced in circles keeping time with their feet. They used rhythm instruments, such as dried gourd and turtle shell rattles, to accompany their songs and dances. Wooden drums covered with skins often had walnuts attached to make a rattling sound. Another instrument Powhatan Indians played was the reed flute.

Although the people did not create objects as art pieces, they put much creativity and beauty into everyday utensils and other things they made. Women wove baskets and bags out of reeds and cordage. They made pottery and decorated clothing with beads, shells and painted designs. Even the tattooing on their bodies was a form of artistic expression.

What prior knowledge did the Powhatan Indians have of European cultures before the English arrived?

Contact with Europeans began in the early 16th century when French and Spanish ships sailed the Chesapeake Bay. In the mid-16th century, an Englishman on board a French privateer described a “very good bay” at about 37 degrees latitude. A Virginia Indian was taken from his home about the year 1560 and sent on a ship to strange lands. His Spanish captors gave him a new name, Don Luis. For ten years he lived in their culture and learned their ways. He may have shown them that his own culture was not as backward or uncivilized as some of them thought.

Don Luis left this culture behind him when he was taken and forced to live among the Spanish for ten years in their various capitals - Mexico City, Madrid, and Havana. In 1570 he was asked by missionaries to assist them in establishing a mission in his home territory. He accompanied a group of Jesuits to the peninsula between what is now the James and York Rivers in coastal plain Virginia. But he soon went back to his own people, leaving the Jesuits to fend for themselves. When the priests’ food supply ran out, they asked Don Luis to help them. His response was to have his people kill the Jesuits, sparing only one boy. A Spanish military expedition retrieved this boy in 1572, and nothing more is known about Don Luis thereafter.

Powhatan was certainly aware of these foreign intruders within and on the edges of his territory. Their presence, along with the alarming prophecy of destruction by invaders, undoubtedly influenced his attitude toward the Jamestown settlers who sailed into Tsenacommacah in 1607.

When was first contact made with the English?

On December 20, 1606, three English ships carrying 144 men and boys set sail from London bound for Virginia. The ships traveled the favored southerly course across the Atlantic Ocean, taking advantage of trade winds and stopping at numerous islands to re-supply. After 6,000 miles and over four months at sea in cramped quarters and unsanitary conditions, the English sighted the coast of Virginia. In 1607, George Percy noted, “...about foure a clocke in the morning, wee descried the Land of Virginia. The same day, wee entered into the Bay of Chesupioc directly, without any let or hindrance.”

While the ships anchored off Cape Henry, a scouting party went ashore to explore. An unexpected attack by a small band of Indians sent them back to the ships with two wounded men. That same night they opened the Virginia Company of London’s orders and read the names of seven men appointed to the governing council in Virginia. Several days later the settlers raised a cross and named the cape in honor of Prince Henry, the son of James I. This confirmed English claims to Virginia, established twenty years earlier by the Roanoke colony. On May 14, 1607 the English disembarked at Jamestown Island.



Pomeiooc, Theodor de Bry, 1590

Where was the closest Powhatan tribe to the Jamestown colony?

The closest Powhatan tribe to the Jamestown colony was that of the Paspehegh, who had towns upriver from Jamestown on both sides of the Chickahominy River. This tribe of at least 200 people was one of the core tribes of the Powhatan chiefdom. The people lived in a rich environment where two water zones merged, providing both fresh and salt water fish.

The Paspehegh welcomed the English to Virginia at first. When the newcomers settled on Jamestown Island in Paspehegh country, however, the Indians wavered between assisting the English and attacking James Fort. With



Indian village burning, Theodor de Bry, 1634

growing numbers of English settlers, the need for food became more desperate by 1609, and the colonists used forceful means to take food from the Indians. This occurred during a period of drought when Indian food supplies were scarce as well. Continued English aggression for food led to the Indian siege on the fort during the winter of 1609-10, often called “the starving time.” After the English made retaliatory attacks in 1610, numerous Paspehegh Indians were killed, including the chief and his family. The remainder

abandoned the area and joined other groups. In 1618, this tract of land, set aside by the English to support the Governor, was described as “Land formerly conquer’d or purchased of the Paspeheies.”

Why did the Powhatan Indians go to war?

“When they intend any warres, the Werowances [chiefs] usually have the advice of their Priests and Conjurors, and their Allies and ancient friends...They seldom make warre for lands or goods, but for women and children, and principally for revenge,” John Smith noted in 1612.

The Powhatan people went to war to defend their territory, to seek revenge or to capture women and children for adoption into the tribe, increasing the population and workforce. Warfare provided men with an opportunity to gain honor and prestige. Battle trophies such as scalps were worn as signs of bravery. Enemy warriors were killed in combat or captured and tortured.



1622 Indian uprising, Theodor de Bry, 1634

Most battles were small surprise attacks fought from behind trees or tall grass. This is the tactic used when local Indians such as the Paspehegh attacked James Fort. Occasionally, the people used half-moon or square formations, attacking in ordered ranks and fighting in hand-to-hand-combat. Bows, arrows and clubs were the weapons of war. Large numbers of arrow points were found by APVA - Preservation Virginia archaeologists in excavations at James Fort. Powhatan warriors also used stone knives, wooden swords and shields made of bark.

When did the Powhatan people begin to experience conflict with the English?

From the beginning of English settlement the Powhatan Indians and the English were in contact. Sometimes the contact was for trade and diplomacy. At other times conflict resulted. Indians attacked the colonists

several times within the first year. After the English demanded food in 1609, war broke out and the Indians laid siege to James Fort. With the development of new settlements between 1611 and 1613, the English pushed the Powhatan people off their best riverfront land. Both groups raided each other, kidnapped each other and tortured each other. A tenuous peace did not come until 1614.

As both sides struggled for dominance, relations between the two groups deteriorated. Because the Indians had not developed the land or exploited its natural resources for profit, the English continued to claim it as their own. They established more plantations along the James River after 1616. The Powhatan Indians resented the intrusion of English settlements on Indian lands and attempts to change their culture and convert them to Christianity.

How did the Powhatan Indians and the English overcome the language barrier?

As the Indians and English began to interact with each other for the purposes of trade or diplomacy, the ability to communicate with each other became increasingly important. Both English and Powhatan leaders realized early on the value of trading adolescent boys to learn one another's language and culture and to act as messengers between the



Captain Argall meeting with the Chickahominies, Theodor de Bry, 1634

cultures. They could easily absorb a foreign language and were adaptable to new situations. Our language in America today still reflects these early efforts at communication. Examples of some Powhatan words that have been adopted into English are raccoon, opossum, hickory, pecan, moccasin and tomahawk.

Thomas Savage was a “gift” from Captain Christopher Newport to Powhatan in 1608, in exchange for Powhatan's servant. Henry Spelman arrived in Virginia in 1609 and was sent to the Indians to “ensure the good behaviour” of English settlers living upriver. Robert Poole came in 1611 and was assigned to Opechancanough, Powhatan's brother, as an interpreter in 1614. Both sides manipulated these boys as pawns in the struggle for power.

Although often mistrusted, the interpreters remained loyal to English values. Henry Spelman lived for more than a year with the Patowomekes on the Potomac River, where he was treated as a special guest and recorded his observations of their language and life ways in his *Relation of Virginia*. Savage and Poole became wealthy through the Virginia fur trade.



Pocahontas, copy of 1616 engraving by Simon van de Passe

in James Fort to show the English how to plant corn. When Christopher Newport traded Thomas Savage to Powhatan in 1608, Powhatan's servant Namontack was exchanged. Newport took Namontack to England and introduced him as the son of “the emperor of Virginia,” and he returned to Virginia with greater knowledge of English culture.

Although the English hoped to entice the Indians to send their children to the English to become acculturated, they were reluctant to do so. Only a small minority lived with settlers and accepted English life. These included Pocahontas, the daughter of the most powerful Indian leader, Powhatan. Pocahontas first met John Smith in December 1607 when he was captured and brought before her father in his village at Werowocomoco. Smith wrote that Pocahontas

Powhatan people also served as emissaries, either willingly or unwillingly living with the English. John Smith held two as prisoners

rescued him from death, but some historians speculate that he was part of a ritual or test Powhatan used to assert his authority over the English in Virginia. In 1613, Pocahontas was kidnapped by the English to ransom English prisoners held by Powhatan and to retrieve stolen weapons. She was taken up the James River to Henrico and taught English customs and religion by the Anglican minister, Alexander Whitaker. She also met John Rolfe, the planter who introduced tobacco as a cash crop in the colony. In 1614, she was baptized with the Christian name Rebecca and married John Rolfe. The following year they had a son, Thomas. During this period there was relative peace between the Powhatan Indians and the English.

Other examples of cultural exchange were Chanco, a young Powhatan male who lived and worked with a settler on the Pamunkey River, and another unnamed boy who also lived with the English. The two Indians both warned the English about the upcoming 1622 Powhatan attack. As with the English, these intermediaries were essential to, and yet mistrusted by, both sides.

Why did war break out between the Powhatan Indians and English in 1622?



1622 Indian uprising, Theodor de Bry, 1634

By 1622, Powhatan and Pocahontas were dead, and the English had spread deep into Powhatan territory. The English forced the Indians to move inland away from their traditional river valley homes. Native leaders under Opechancanough, Powhatan's half-brother and successor, had privately adopted a more militant attitude toward the English.

On March 22, 1622, Opechancanough led a coordinated attack on several English plantations, killing more than 300 of the 1,200 colonists. Jamestown was warned and escaped destruction. Colonists from outlying areas were ordered into fortified settlements, where severe food shortages occurred and contagious diseases spread. The settlers retaliated, burning Indian villages, taking their corn in "feed fights", and killing the inhabitants.

The 1622 attack was followed by a decade of open warfare with intermittent raids, kidnappings and ambushes by both sides. A treaty in 1632 created a decade of tenuous peace. However, all Indians were barred from traveling on the lower James-York peninsula.

Why did peace between the Powhatan people and English end?

The spread of settlement strained relations again by 1644. On April 18, Opechancanough launched a second major uprising, killing more than 400 colonists. Indian resistance was short-lived, however. Again, English retaliatory raids destroyed villages and cornfields, and the Indians hid in the forests. In 1646, the English captured Opechancanough and took him to Jamestown, where he was shot and killed. The remaining Powhatan people were defeated.



Copper Indian badge, 1662

In 1646, Necotowance, Opechancanough's successor, made a formal peace treaty with the Virginia government. The Indians had to pay an annual tribute to Virginia officials and withdraw from the James-York peninsula. All native messengers entering this English territory had to wear a special striped coat or face death. The Powhatan people experienced confinement to land north of the York River by the middle of the 17th century, losing critical access to traditional hunting and fishing grounds. A 1656 law required Indians to carry a pass or



**Powhatan Indian cooking pot and pipe,
Late Woodland Period**

ticket whenever they wanted to hunt or fish or forage within the colonial designated areas. A 1662 law made them wear silver or copper badges inscribed with their tribe's name whenever they entered these areas. Settlers were forbidden to encroach on designated Indian lands, but planters paid little heed as they ventured farther and farther north. For self-preservation, smaller tribal groups merged with larger ones, losing their independent identity.

How did life change for the Powhatan people in the late 17th century?

As English plantations expanded and Indian-controlled lands shrank, it became much harder for the Powhatan people to support themselves. There was less unclaimed land available for hunting and agriculture, and Powhatan participation in the fur trade declined. Other Indian groups beyond the limits of the English settlement took over this valuable trade.

The Powhatan people still desired English goods, however, so they had to find other ways to pay for them. A few Indians became planters themselves, buying or patenting land under English law. Some became tenant farmers, renting English-owned land. Many other Indians combined their traditional economic activities with part-time work for the English in a variety of different jobs.

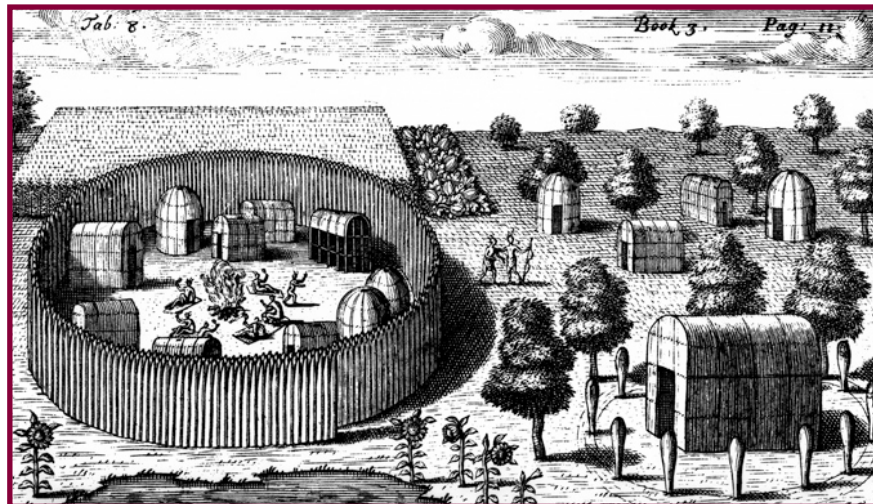
Indian craftsmen also began making items to sell to the English. In 1676, the Virginia government set up regular markets in the colony where Indians could sell items like clay pots, tobacco pipes and woven mats to the English. All of these endeavors helped the remaining Indian communities survive in a world that was increasingly dominated by English people and institutions.

The end of the Powhatan paramount chiefdom left the Indians of the Virginia coastal plain divided into several different tribal groups, each of whom had to find their own way of dealing with a rapidly changing world. Some of these groups broke apart into even smaller units, but others joined together, forming new tribal alliances to help maintain a way of life different from that of Virginia's English majority.

It is clear that most Indians preferred to keep their own customs and institutions, despite pressure from Virginia's colonial government to adopt English ways. Some Powhatan people, especially tribal leaders, learned to speak English in order to deal with governmental authorities, and by the end of the 17th century, younger Indians had begun to speak English as their first language. Even so, most Indians chose to live lives that were different from the lives of their English neighbors.

What became of the Powhatan Indians?

The Powhatan Indians overcame many obstacles, including years of discrimination, and learned to adapt in order to survive. As a



**Indian village, from Robert Beverley's
The History and Present State of Virginia, 1705**

way of economic survival, smaller tribes merged with larger ones, jeopardizing independent identity. Strong kinship networks helped tribal identities endure even when economic necessity led to the dispersal of tribal populations. Family became the chief mechanism for the survival of Powhatan culture, a tradition that endures right up to the present day, with eight recognized tribes in Virginia. These include seven Powhatan tribes—Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Mattaponi, Nansemond, Pamunkey, Rappahannock, Upper Mattaponi- and the Monocan Nation in Virginia's Piedmont.

All items pictured are from the collection of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation.

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