

## The Hardships and Survival of Jamestown

The English colonists found life in Jamestown harder than they expected. One problem they had to deal with was their water supply. Most of the available water was salty and unsafe for drinking. In addition, the marshy land was filled with mosquitoes that carried diseases like malaria. This disease weakened many of the settlers. Another problem involved the skills of the settlers. Many of the men did not have the skills necessary to survive in the wilderness. Some knew how to build or make tools, but none of them were farmers, and even though wild animals and seafood were plentiful, the colonists were afraid to venture too far from the settlement. To make matters worse, a fire destroyed their storehouse and the colonists lost most of their food supplies. As a result of all of this, the colonists were not able to obtain the food they needed to survive and the starving time began in the winter of 1609. Only about 60 colonists survived out of 500.

Eventually, however, changes took place to ensure the survival of Jamestown. John Smith was crucial to the survival of the colony. Due to bad government and near chaos, Smith was eventually elected president of the colony. He began a policy of rigid discipline, strengthened defenses, and encouraged farming with this admonishment: "He who does not work, will not eat." Smith encouraged the colonists to grow crops for their own families to live on. This self-sustaining agriculture encouraged the colonists to work harder. The arrival of two supply ships also helped strengthen the settlement.

Captain Smith also started a trading relationship with the Powhatan Indians. The Powhatan people contributed to the survival of the Jamestown settlers in several ways. The Powhatan traded furs, food, and leather with the English in exchange for tools, pots, guns, and other goods. They also introduced new crops to the English, including corn and tobacco. Pocahontas, the daughter of Chief Powhatan, believed that the English and the Indians could live in harmony. Her friendship with the colonists helped them survive even though the Powhatans saw the colonists as invaders who might eventually take over their land. Because of Captain John Smith's strong leadership, the settlement survived and grew. The remains of this remarkable English colony still exist. Today Jamestown is located on an island in the James River.