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**First Year ASCC Lecture on American First Settlements**

**PART ONE**

**Introduction to American Discovery**

Long before the English or any of Europeans arrived, [Native Americans](https://www.legendsofamerica.com/native-americans/) occupied the continent for many thousands of years and archeological evidence indicates that they utilized the Jamestown region for over 10,000 years. England was a latecomer to the American scene as far as exploration. North America had been explored as early as the 10th century by the Vikings, followed by [Christopher Columbus](https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ah-christophercolumbus/) in 1492, and numerous others.

**The settlement of Jamestown Colony**

The first attempt at settlement by the English was known as the [lost colony of Roanoke](https://www.legendsofamerica.com/roanoke-lost-colony/) in 1587. Twenty years later, in 1607, through a venture company known as the Virginia Company, England would establish her first permanent colony called Jamestown. It all began on December 6, 1606, when three ships: the Susan Constant, the Godspeed, and the Discovery left England bound for America. In early 1607, 104 English men and boys arrived in North America and began to search for a place to start a settlement. On May 13, 1607, they chose Jamestown, [Virginia](https://www.legendsofamerica.com/virginia/), which was named after their King, James I. The settlement became the first permanent English settlement in North America.

The site for Jamestown was picked for several reasons, all of which met criteria that the Virginia Company, who funded the settlement, ordered to follow. The region was surrounded by water on three sides (it was not fully an island yet) and was far inland; both of which meant it was easily defensible against possible Spanish attacks. The water was also deep enough that the English could tie their ships at the shoreline, and at the time, the site was not inhabited by [Native Americans](https://www.legendsofamerica.com/native-americans/).

Once the place was chosen, the instructions sent by the Virginia Company, which included a list of the council members chosen by the company, was read. The names had been kept in sealed boxes on the ships, not to be read until a site was chosen. The first President of the new Virginia colony was to be Captain Edward Maria Winfield and the other six council members included Bartholomew Gosnold, Christopher Newport, John Martin, John Ratcliffe, George Kendall, and [Captain John Smith](https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ah-johnsmith/).

**Life in Jamestown and relations with Native Americans**

By June 15th a fort was completed. The settlers were now protected against any attacks that might occur from the local [Powhatan](https://www.legendsofamerica.com/na-powhatan/) Indians, whose hunting land they were living on. Prior to the Jamestown immigrants’ arrival, relations had already been mixed between the newcomers and the Powhatan Indians. On June 22nd, Captain Christopher Newport left for England to get more supplies for the new settlement.

When the new settlers first arrived, they had been greeted by friendly Indians who had provided them with supplies of maize. However, as the English, were not able to grow their own food, became hungry, they began to force the natives for more and more supplies. This immediately caused conflict between the settlers and the Indian of the area.

**Problems that Faced the New Settlers**

In addition to that, the settlers began to succumb to a variety of diseases. They were drinking water from the salty or slimy river, which caused the death of many. The death toll was high with the men dying from swellings, malaria, fever, famine, and sometimes because of fights with the Indians. Food was scarce, even though the Indian Chief Powhatan had started to send gifts of food to help the English. If the [Powhatan Indians](https://www.legendsofamerica.com/na-powhatan/) did not help the new settlers in the early years, the settlement would most likely have failed.

By late 1609, the English lost the help of the Powhatan Indians as the English were demanding too much food during a drought. The winter of 1609-10 became known as the “Starving Time” and the English had become afraid to leave the fort, fearful they would be killed by Indians. As a result, they ate anything they could include various animals, leather from their shoes and belts, and even resorting to cannibalism after their fellow settlers died. By early 1610 most of the Jamestown immigrants, estimated at 80-90%, had died due to starvation and disease.