

Native americans of chesapeake bay

Countries



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The Native American group in the Chesapeake Bay region was known collectively as the Powhatan Federation of Indians. Powhatan also refers to the Algonquin Indian chief that lived and ruled in the region around the early 17th century. The Algonquians were a deeply religious group of people subsisted primarily through agriculture. The natives referred to the area as Tsenacommacah. Powhatan was the weroance, or chief ruler of Tsenacommacah and 25 other Algonquin villages. Powhatan would play a significant role with the 104 men from the Virginia company that made up the settlement of Jamestown.

Powhatan agreed to an alliance with the settlers, Powhatan would provide the colonists with foodstuffs in exchange for guns, hatchets, and swords. Powhatan hoped this alliance would make him technologically superior over his people's enemies. The following is a quote from Powhatan recorded by John Smith in 1609; " I am not so simple as not to know it is better to eat good meat, sleep comfortably, live quietly with my women and children, laugh and be merry with the English, and being their friend, trade for their copper and hatchets, than to run away from them. (Smithsonian source, 2012) Joint stock companies were business corporations that amassed capital through sales of stock to investors. Joint stock companies were the forerunners for modern day corporations. The Virginia Company was a joint stock venture that funded the settlement at Jamestown. Colonies required ongoing capital investments and the lack of immediate returns created tensions between stockholders and the colonists. Although investors were expecting great returns, there was great risk and start up costs, and could take years to recoup their money.

With an excess landless population to serve as workers, and motivated, adventurous, or devout investors, the joint-stock company became the vehicle by which England finally settled the Western Hemisphere. The first joint stock company to launch its venture in the new world was The Virginia Company of London. In 1607 The Virginia Company established the first colony along the Chesapeake bay in what is now modern day Virginia. The new colony was called Jamestown, named after King James I. The colonists arrived in the midst of the worse drought in 1, 700 years, and life in the new world was hard from the get go.

The settlement at Jamestown was on a swampy peninsula located in the middle of a river. The colonists proved to be ill equipped for survival, and many fell victim to starvation and disease. In attempts to ease the colonists struggle for food, Captain John Smith made a deal with the weroance. The Powhatan would help the colonists acquire food in exchange for weaponry. This deal was short lasting, as mutual mistrust built on both sides. The weroance relocated his primary village to an area not easily accessible to the colonists. The colonists struggled greatly without Powhatan's help, and soon were driven to starvation.

This time of hardship for the colonists was referred to as the "starving time." The situation was very bleak for the colonists, and the starving time lasted from 1609-1610. Throughout the colonists year long struggle for survival many died, and one colonist resorted to cannibalism. This was the beginning of a bloody history that ensued between the colonists and the Powhatan people. In the spring of 1610 a new wave of settlers came to Jamestown, and

brought with them more supplies. Around 1613, and in attempts to gain the upper hand, the colonists kidnapped Powhatan's daughter Pocahontas.

During her captivity she was converted to Christianity and married settler John Rolfe. This event helped to further sour the relationship between the two groups. The two also could not come to terms on each others ideas of property rights, gender roles, and religion. The colonists thought the Powhatan were lazy because they did not cultivate crops, conversely the Powhatan thought the colonists effeminate for doing so. Perhaps the biggest cause for dispute was the colonists superiority complex, in which they expected full cooperation from the native people to convert to Christianity and adopt English customs.

Around 1620 Jamestown finally began to prosper through tobacco cultivation and exportation. Opechancanough, Powhatan's brother, and successor, watched as the colonists expanded and attempted to convert the natives to Christianity. This angered Opechancanough, and in March of 1622 he attacked, killing 347 colonists. The Powhatans indiscriminately attacked, men, women, and children, mutilating many of their corpses. Although the colonists were surprised at the treachery of the Powhatans, a decade and a half of hatred fueled the natives call for vengeance.

The massacre was a terrible loss to the settlers, but still they persevered. A short time had passed until the settlers inflicted massive retaliation on the Powhatans. One of the colonists wrote, " Now we have just cause to destroy them by all means possible, it is more easy to civilize them by conquest than faire meanest. " (Schwarz, 1997) The two sides continued their brutal onslaught for the next ten years, and in 1632 an ill advised cease-fire was

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agreed upon. However, in 1644 the Powhatans attacked one last time, killing several more hundred settlers.

In 1646 the Powhatans surrendered for good, but the bloody history and interaction of the two will never be forgotten. Norton, M. B. , Sheriff, C. , Blight, D. W. , Chudacoff, H. P. , Logevall, F. , Bailey, B. (2012), A people & a nation, a history of the united states (Vol. 1) Ninth edition. Boston, MA, Wadsworth, Cengage Learning. Schwarz, Frederic D. " Massacre. " American Heritage Feb. -Mar. 1997 US History Collection. Web. 1 Apr. 2012Smith, John. (nd). Smithsonian Source. In Resources for teaching American History. Retrieved April 1, 2012, from [http://www. smithsoniansource. org/](http://www.smithsoniansource.org/).