

# An English Settlement at Jamestown

## MAIN IDEA

The first permanent English settlement in North America was founded at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

English colonies in Virginia developed into the present states of the southern United States.

## Terms & Names

- John Smith
- joint-stock companies
- Jamestown
- Powhatan
- headright system
- indentured servant
- royal colony
- Nathaniel Bacon

## One American's Story

**John Smith** craved adventure. In 1600, at age 20, Smith trekked across Europe and helped Hungary fight a war against the Turks. For his heroic battle efforts, the Hungarians offered a knighthood to Smith, who inscribed his coat of arms with the phrase *Vincere est vivere*—"to conquer is to live."

In 1606, the daring and often arrogant adventurer approached the members of the Virginia Company, a group of merchants who were interested in founding an English colony in North America. Smith later recalled the opportunities that he saw open to him and other potential colonists.

### A PERSONAL VOICE JOHN SMITH

"What man who is poor or who has only his merit to advance his fortunes can desire more contentment than to walk over and plant the land he has obtained by risking his life? . . . Here nature and liberty . . . [give] us freely that which we lack or have to pay dearly for in England. . . .

What pleasure can be greater than to grow tired from . . . planting vines, fruits, or vegetables?"

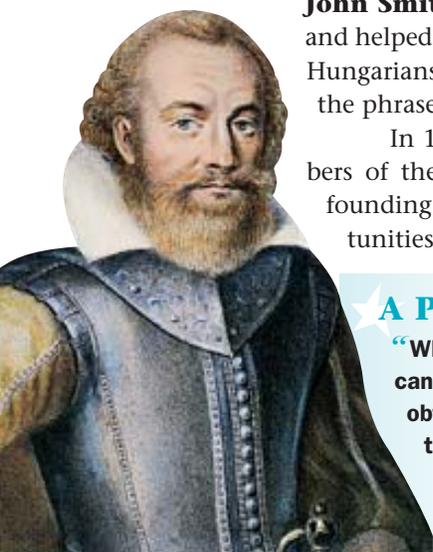
—*The General History of Virginia*

With the help of Smith's leadership and, later, the production of the profitable crop of tobacco, England's small North American settlement survived.

## English Settlers Struggle in North America

England's first attempts to carve out a colony of its own in North America nearly collapsed because of disease and starvation.

**THE BUSINESS OF COLONIZATION** Unlike Spanish colonies, which were funded by Spanish rulers, English colonies were originally funded and maintained by **joint-stock companies**. Stock companies allowed several investors to pool their wealth in support of a colony that would, hopefully, yield a profit. Once they had obtained a charter, or official permit, a stock company accepted responsibility for



▲ **John Smith, shown here in a 19th-century copy of a 1616 portrait, was a self-proclaimed soldier of fortune, a sea captain, and a poet.**



maintaining the colony, in return for which they would be entitled to receive back most of the profit that the colony might yield.

In 1606, King James I of England granted a charter to the Virginia Company. The company hoped to found a colony along the eastern shores of North America in territory explored earlier by Sir Walter Raleigh. Raleigh had named the territory Virginia after Elizabeth I (1533–1603), “the virgin queen.” The Virginia Company had lured financial supporters by asking for a relatively small investment. Stockholders would be entitled to receive four-fifths of all gold and silver found by the colonists. The king would receive the remaining fifth.

The Virginia Company’s three ships—*Susan Constant*, *Discovery*, and *Godspeed*—with nearly 150 passengers and crew members aboard, reached the shores of Virginia in April of 1607. They slipped into a broad coastal river and sailed inland until they reached a small peninsula. There, the colonists claimed the land as theirs. They named the settlement **Jamestown** and the river the James, in honor of their king.

**A DISASTROUS START** John Smith sensed trouble from the beginning. As he wrote later, “There was no talk, no hope, no work, but dig gold, wash gold, refine gold, load gold.” Smith warned of disaster, but few listened to the arrogant captain, who had made few friends on the voyage over.

Disease from contaminated river water struck first. Hunger soon followed. The colonists, many of whom were unaccustomed to a life of labor, had refused to clear fields, plant crops, or even gather shellfish from the river’s edge. One settler later described the terrifying predicament.

### A PERSONAL VOICE

“Thus we lived for the space of five months in this miserable distress . . . our men night and day groaning in every corner of the fort, most pitiful to hear. If there were any conscience in men, it would make their hearts to bleed to hear the pitiful murmurings and outcries of our sick men for relief, every night and day for the space of six weeks: some departing out of the World, many times three or four in a night; in the morning their bodies being trailed out of their cabins like dogs, to be buried.”

—A Jamestown colonist quoted in *A New World*

On a cold winter day in 1607, standing among the 38 colonists who remained alive, John Smith took control of the settlement. “You see that power now rests wholly with me,” he announced. “You must now obey this law, . . . he that will not work shall not eat.” Smith held the colony together by forcing the colonists to farm. He also persuaded the nearby **Powhatan** people to provide food. Unfortunately, later that winter, a stray spark ignited a gunpowder bag Smith was wearing and set him on fire. Badly burned, Smith headed back to England, leaving Jamestown to fend for itself.

In the spring of 1609, about 600 new colonists arrived with hopes of starting a new life in the colony. The Powhatan, by now alarmed at the growing number of settlers, began to kill the colonists’ livestock and destroy their farms. By the following winter, conditions in Jamestown had deteriorated to the point of famine. In what became known as the “starving time,” the colonists ate roots, rats, snakes, and even boiled shoe leather. Of those 600 new colonists, only about 60 survived. **A**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

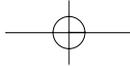
**A** What factors contributed to the near failure of Jamestown?

### HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT



#### THE MYSTERY OF ROANOKE

England’s first attempt to plant a colony in North America at what is now Roanoke Island remains shrouded in mystery. After one failed attempt in 1585, Sir Walter Raleigh (pictured above) dispatched a second expedition in 1587. Its captain, John White, sailed back to England for supplies. Upon his return to Roanoke in 1590, White found the settlement empty, the colonists vanished. The word “CROATOAN” (a Native American tribe) was carved into a tree. Historians believe that the colonists starved or were either attacked by or joined with local Native American tribes.



## Rediscovering Fort James

Erosion turned the Jamestown Peninsula into an island and, for many years, the site of the original Fort James was assumed to be under water. However, in 1996, archaeologists from the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities discovered artifacts on what they concluded was the original site of the fort.

Since then, archaeologists have discovered armor, weapons, even games used by the first colonists. Archaeologists and historians are constantly learning more and more about this long-buried treasure of American history.

16th-century helmet and breastplate. ▶



▲ An archaeologist kneels beside holes left from the original palisade fence of Fort James. Note that the palisades were less than one foot in width.



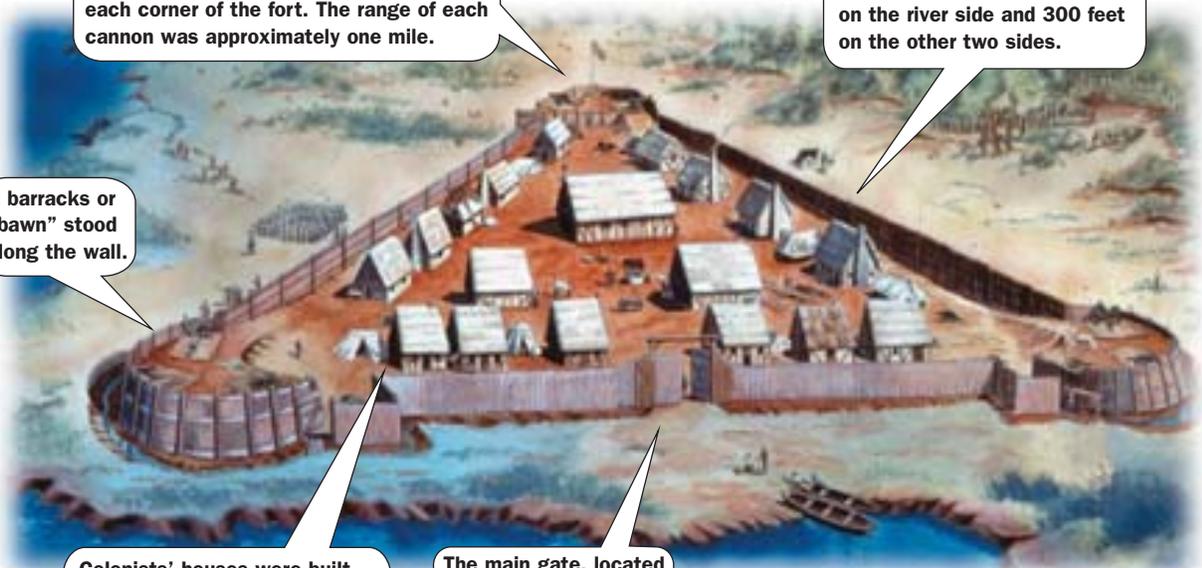
Rounded bulwarks, or watch towers, mounted with cannon were located at each corner of the fort. The range of each cannon was approximately one mile.

The walls of the triangular-shaped fort measured 420 feet on the river side and 300 feet on the other two sides.

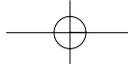
A barracks or "bawn" stood along the wall.

Colonists' houses were built about ten feet from the fort's walls. Houses measured sixteen by forty feet and several colonists lived in each.

The main gate, located on the long side, faced the James River.



▲ This illustration re-creates what historians and archaeologists now believe Fort James looked like early in its history.



**JAMESTOWN BEGINS TO FLOURISH** The surviving colonists decided to abandon the seemingly doomed settlement. However, as they sailed down the James River, they were met by a second English ship whose passengers convinced the fleeing colonists to turn around. Under the watchful eye of new leaders, who did not hesitate to flog or even hang colonists found neglecting their work, Jamestown stabilized and the colony began to expand farther inland along the James River. However, equally important in the colony's growth was the development of a highly profitable crop: tobacco.

**"BROWN GOLD" AND INDENTURED SERVANTS** Europeans had become aware of tobacco soon after Columbus's first return from the West Indies. In 1612, the Jamestown colonist John Rolfe experimented by cross breeding tobacco from Brazil with a harsh strain of the weed that local Native Americans had grown for years. Rolfe's experiment resulted in a high-quality tobacco strain for which the citizens of England soon clamored. By the late 1620s, colonists exported more than 1.5 million pounds of "brown gold" to England each year. **B**

In order to grow tobacco, the Virginia Company needed a key ingredient that was missing from the colony—field laborers. In an effort to lure settlers to Jamestown, the Virginia Company introduced the **headright system** in 1618. Under this system, anyone who paid for their own or another's passage to Virginia received 50 acres of land. Immigration to the colony jumped.

The headright system yielded huge land grants for anyone who was wealthy enough to transport large numbers of people to Virginia. The Company used the term "plantation" for the group of people who settled the land grant, but eventually, the term was used to refer to the land itself. To work their plantations, many owners imported **indentured servants** from England. In exchange for passage to North America, and food and shelter upon arrival, an indentured servant agreed to a limited term of servitude—usually four to seven years. Indentured servants were usually from the lower classes of English society. **C**

### **THE FIRST AFRICAN LABORERS**

Another group of laborers—Africans—first arrived in Virginia aboard a Dutch merchant ship in 1619. Records suggest that the Jamestown colonists treated the group of about 20 Africans as indentured servants. After a few years, most of the Africans received land and freedom. Meanwhile, other Africans continued to arrive in the colony in small numbers, but it would be several decades before the English colonists in North America began the systematic use of Africans as slave labor.

#### **MAIN IDEA**

##### **Analyzing Events**

**B** Why was tobacco so important to the Jamestown colony?

#### **MAIN IDEA**

##### **Contrasting**

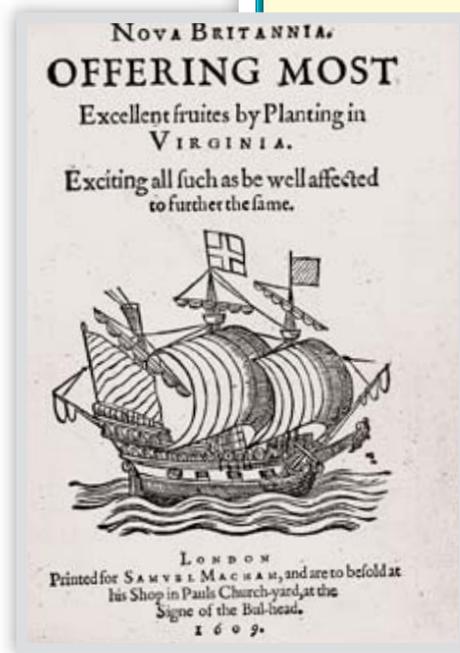
**C** How did the conditions of indentured servitude differ from those of the headright system?

## **ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE**

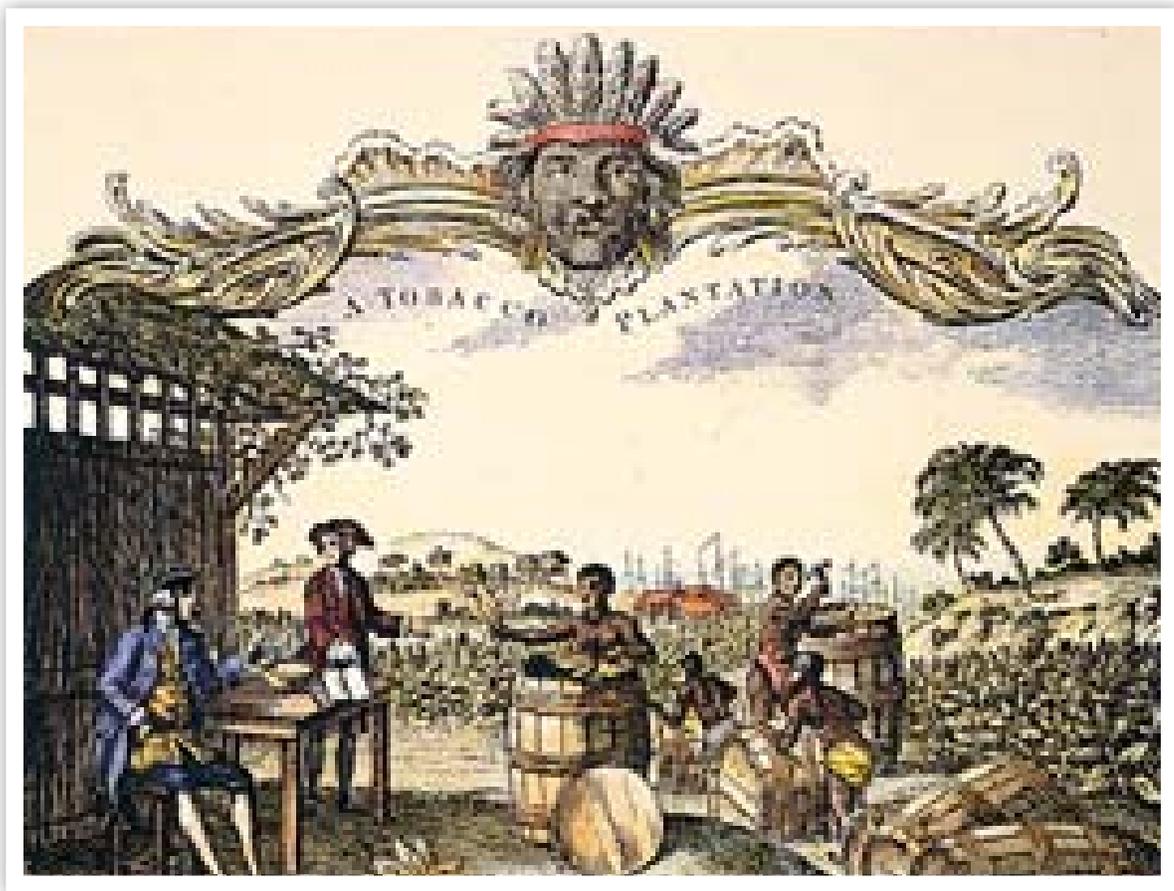
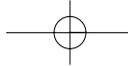
### **FANTASIES OF THE "NEW WORLD"**

By the early 1600s, many Englishmen, weary of wars and living in overcrowded cities, listened eagerly to early reports about Virginia. Playwrights, poets, and adventurers, most of whom had never seen the "New World," turned those reports into fantasies of a "promised land," a place of fair climate, friendly natives, rich harvests, and bright futures.

A play produced in London in 1605 described Virginia as a place where native children wore rubies and diamonds in their coats and caps. In 1606, the English poet Michael Drayton called Virginia "that delicious land" because of its rich soil and fantastic harvests. By 1607, the Virginia Company officers translated those fantasies into advertisements. During the "starving time," Jamestown colonists must have bitterly recalled the promises made in those advertisements.



◀ This poster, dated 1609, reflects an attempt to attract settlers to the early Virginia colony.



▲ In this 18th-century engraving, a Virginia planter oversees slaves packing tobacco leaves for shipment to England.

One reason for this was economics. In Virginia, where tobacco served as currency in the early 1600s, an indentured servant could be purchased for 1,000 pounds of tobacco, while a slave might cost double or triple that amount. However, by the late 1600s, a decline in the indentured servant population coupled with an increase in the colonies' overall wealth spurred the colonists to begin importing slaves in huge numbers. While the life of indentured servants was difficult, slaves endured far worse conditions. Servants could eventually become full members of society, but slaves were condemned to a life of harsh labor. 🗣️

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

🗣️ What factors led to the importation of African slaves to Virginia?

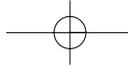
## The Settlers Clash with Native Americans

As the English settlers expanded their settlement, their uneasy relations with the Native Americans worsened. The colonists' desire for more land led to warfare with the original inhabitants of Virginia.

**THE ENGLISH PATTERN OF CONQUEST** Unlike the Spanish, whose colonists intermarried with Native Americans, the English followed the pattern used when they conquered the Irish during the 1500s and 1600s. England's Laws of Conquest declared, in part, "Every Irishman shall be forbidden to wear English apparel or weapons upon pain of death." The same law also banned marriages between the English and the Irish.

The English brought this pattern of colonization with them to North America. Viewing the Native Americans as being "like the wild Irish," the English settlers had no desire to live among or intermarry with the Native Americans they defeated.

**THE SETTLERS BATTLE NATIVE AMERICANS** As the English settlers recovered in the years following the starving time, they never forgot the Powhatan's hostility


**MAIN IDEA**
**Analyzing Causes**

**E** Why were the colonists in conflict with the Powhatan?

during the starving time. In retaliation, the leaders of Jamestown demanded tributes of corn and labor from the local native peoples. Soldiers pressed these demands by setting Powhatan villages on fire and kidnapping hostages, especially children. One of the kidnapped children, Chief Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas, married John Rolfe in 1614. This laid the groundwork for a half-hearted peace. However, the peace would not last, as colonists continued to move further into Native American territory and seize more land to grow tobacco. **E**

By 1622, English settlers had worn out the patience of Chief Opechancanough, Chief Powhatan's brother and successor. In a well-planned attack, Powhatan raiding parties struck at colonial villages up and down the James River, killing more than 340 colonists. The attack forced the Virginia Company to send in more troops and supplies, leaving it nearly bankrupt. In 1624, James I, disgusted by the turmoil in Virginia, revoked the company's charter and made Virginia a **royal colony**—one under direct control of the king. England sent more troops and settlers to strengthen the colony and to conquer the Powhatan. By 1644, nearly 10,000 English men and women lived in Virginia, while the Powhatan population continued to fall.



▲ Pocahontas as she appeared during her visit to England in 1616–1617

## Economic Differences Split Virginia

By the 1670s, many of the free white men in Virginia were former indentured servants who, although they had completed their servitude, had little money to buy land. Because they did not own land, they could not vote and therefore enjoyed almost no rights in colonial society. These poor colonists lived mainly on the western outskirts of Virginia, where they constantly fought with Native Americans for land.

**HOSTILITIES DEVELOP** During the 1660s and 1670s, Virginia's poor settlers felt oppressed and frustrated by the policies of the colony's governor, Sir William Berkeley. More and more, Berkeley levied or imposed high taxes, which were paid mostly by the poorer settlers who lived along Virginia's western frontier. Moreover, the money collected by these taxes was used not for the public good but for the personal profit of the "Grandeers," or "planters," the wealthy plantation farmers who had settled along the eastern shores of Virginia. Many of these planters occupied positions in the government, positions that they used to protect their own interests. As hostilities began to develop between the settlers along Virginia's western frontier and the Native Americans who lived there, the settlers demanded to know why money collected in taxes and fines was not being used to build forts for their protection.

In 1675, a bloody clash between Virginia's frontier settlers and local natives revealed an underlying tension between the colony's poor whites and its wealthy landowners and sparked a pitched battle between the two classes. In June of 1675, a dispute between the Doeg tribe and a Virginia frontier farmer grew into a bloodbath. A group of frontier settlers who were pursuing Doeg warriors murdered fourteen friendly Susquehannock and then executed five chiefs during a peace conference. Fighting soon broke out between Native Americans and frontier colonists. The colonists pleaded to Governor Berkeley for military support, but the governor, acting on behalf of the wealthy planters, refused to finance a war to benefit the colony's poor frontier settlers.

**BACON'S REBELLION** Berkeley's refusal did not sit well with a twenty-nine-year-old planter named **Nathaniel Bacon**. Bacon, a tall, dark-haired, hot-tempered son of a wealthy Englishman, detested Native Americans. He called

**Vocabulary**

**levy:** to impose or collect



## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

### HOUSE OF BURGESSES

The House of Burgesses served as the first representative body in colonial America. The House first met in Jamestown on July 30, 1619, and included two citizens, or burgesses, from each of Virginia's eleven districts.

The House claimed the authority to raise taxes and make laws. However, the English governor had the right to veto any legislation the House passed. While the House represented a limited constituency—since only white male landowners could vote—it contributed to the development of representative government in English America. A century and a half after its founding, the House of Burgesses would supply delegates to the Continental Congress—the revolutionary body that orchestrated the break from Great Britain.

them “wolves” who preyed upon “our harmless and innocent lambs.” In 1676, Bacon broke from his old friend Berkeley and raised an army to fight Native Americans on the Virginia frontier. **F**

Governor Berkeley quickly declared Bacon's army—one-third of which was made up of landless settlers and debtors—illegal. Hearing this news, Bacon marched on Jamestown in September of 1676 to confront colonial leaders about a number of grievances, including the frontier colonists' lack of representation in the House of Burgesses—Virginia's colonial legislature. Virginia's “rabble,” as many planters called the frontier settlers, resented being taxed and governed without their consent. Ironically, 100 years later in 1776, both wealthy and poor colonists would voice this same complaint against Great Britain at the beginning of the American Revolution.

The march turned violent. The rebels set fire to the town as Berkeley and numerous planters fled by ship. However, Bacon had little time to enjoy his victory. He died of illness a month after storming Jamestown. Upon Bacon's death, Berkeley returned to Jamestown and easily subdued the leaderless rebels.

Bacon's Rebellion, as it came to be known, did succeed in drawing King Charles's attention to Berkeley's government, and Charles's commissioners, or investigators, were highly critical of Berkeley's policies. The old governor was recalled to England to explain himself but died before meeting with the king.

Although it spurred the planter class to cling more tightly to power, Bacon's Rebellion exposed the growing power of the colony's former indentured servants. Meanwhile, farther to the north, another group of English colonists, who had journeyed to North America for religious reasons, were steering their own course into the future.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Issues

**F** Why was Nathaniel Bacon frustrated with Governor Berkeley?



## ASSESSMENT

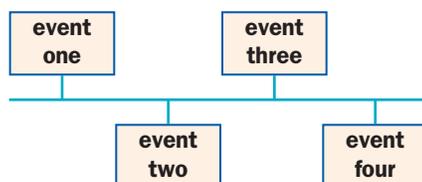
**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- John Smith
- Jamestown
- headright system
- royal colony
- joint-stock companies
- Powhatan
- indentured servant
- Nathaniel Bacon

### MAIN IDEA

**2. TAKING NOTES**

Create a time line of the major developments in the colonization of Virginia, using a form such as the one below.



Which event do you think was the most critical turning point? Why?

### CRITICAL THINKING

**3. RECOGNIZING EFFECTS**

The success of tobacco farming in Virginia had wide-ranging effects. Describe its impact on each of these groups: the Jamestown colonists, indentured servants, the Powhatan, the planters.

**Think About:**

- the headright system and indentured servitude
- the colonists' need for more land
- the conflict between rich and poor colonists

**4. ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES**

The following lines appear in Michael Drayton's 1606 poem, “To the Virginian Voyage”:

**“When as the luscious smell  
of that delicious land  
Above the sea that flows  
The clear wind throws,  
Your hearts to swell”**

What do these lines tell you about the expectations many colonists had before they arrived in Virginia?