

Read this as well about the

tobacco trade

IT HAPPENED IN VIRGINIA

For shipping to England, the dried leaves were stripped off the plants, packed in large barrels called hogsheads, and rolled to the nearest dock to be loaded onto a ship. (Hence many roads in the southern colonies were named Rolling Road.) In England an agent would see to the sale, take his commission, and buy the manufactured goods the Virginians wanted. Tobacco thus became the medium of exchange. Taxes and purchases were always priced in pounds of tobacco; soldiers, officials, and ministers were paid in tobacco. Conducting a funeral cost 400 pounds of tobacco. A wedding cost only half as much!

Because it was profitable and because it soon ruined the field it was planted in, the "vile weed," as King James described it, saved the Virginia colony from bankruptcy and failure but caused many fertile fields to wash into the rivers, sending their owners west. Farmers with large plantations could plant tobacco in a certain field for several years and then clear more land and plant elsewhere, but this was not possible for small farmers.

Because so much hand labor was needed to grow tobacco, indentured servants, African slaves, and criminals were brought to Virginia to work the fields, increasing the population and altering the makeup of the colony. Thus John Rolfe and his Spanish tobacco seeds forever changed Virginia.

Do not write on, Return to Mrs. MCD.

WIVES AND SERVANTS FOR SALE

1619

When word came one day in 1619 that a ship had been sighted, the single men of Virginia bathed, shaved, dressed in their tattered best, and made their way to the dock. Onboard the ship were ninety women, single, "honestly educated" women who had crossed the Atlantic to be their wives. According to instructions, the women were intended for the "most industrious and honest planters." Probably most Virginia men thought they fit that description. A planter could take a wife by paying for her passage with tobacco.

The Virginia men no doubt fantasized about the women who were soon to arrive. Would there be enough women to go around? What if a man was rejected?

Onboard the ship, the women must have had mixed feelings: relief that the long, harrowing voyage was over and they were about to arrive safely in Virginia, but apprehension about what lay ahead. These women were mostly daughters of parents who had no money for dowries, so their chances for marriage in England were limited. In Virginia, however, women were in demand. An informal 1616 census

conducted by John Rolfe had shown that Virginia had an estimated 351 inhabitants, only 65 of whom were women and children.

After arriving in Virginia, all the women soon wed. One of the women, Cecily Johnson, threw the colony into an uproar by promising to marry two suitors. There is no record of how the matter was settled; perhaps there was a duel. More likely she was forced to give up one and choose the other. With the lack of available women in Virginia, it is probable that this type of situation occurred more than once. William Byrd once wrote that a spinster in Virginia was so rare as to be "as ominous as a shooting star."

The men who chose wives from the shiploads of women were doubly blessed: if they paid the passage of a new settler, they were also granted an additional fifty acres of land. What a bargain! They had acquired land and a wife with no need for backbreaking hours of work, a lengthy courtship, or a char with a father.

The reason the London Company, the sponsor of Virginia's first settlers, gave for sending the women was to make the men feel more at home in Virginia. The belief was that if the men had to provide for wives and children, they would feel more tied to the colony. The company required that the young women be educated and from good families. In Virginia, they were to be married to the most industrious and honest of planters, who could pay for their passage and provisions. The cost was 120 pounds of tobacco per maiden.

Once in Virginia, the young women were to be placed in the homes of married couples of good reputation until they were wed. The women were not to be forced into marriage.

Slaves came by the shipload as well. The first African slaves in Virginia were twenty men who had been captured and enslaved in Africa, then brought to Jamestown on August 30, 1619, in a Dutch pirate ship disguised as a man-of-war. In Virginia they were sold to whoever paid the highest price in pounds of tobacco. Two more

Africans were brought to Virginia as slaves between 1620 and 1624, although slavery was not officially sanctioned in the colony until 1661, when it was legalized.

During the colony's first years, before the slave trade became entrenched, much of the labor was done by indentured servants. Whoever paid the passage of the indentured person received his or her labor for five to seven years. At the end of that time, the indentured person was freed and was given either 50 acres of land or the tools of a trade to earn a living.

The ship *Jonathon* arrived in June 1620. Among the 200 passengers were "many maids for wives." A few weeks later the *London Merchant* brought more single women, and in 1621 *Marmaduke, Warwick,* and *Tiger* arrived with cargoes of single women.