

## “The General History of Virginia” Excerpt

John Smith

Being thus left to our fortunes, it happened that within ten days, scarce ten amongst us could either go or well stand, such extreme weakness and sickness oppressed us. And thereat none need marvel if they consider the cause and reason was this: while the ships stayed, our allowance was somewhat bettered by a daily proportion of biscuit which the sailors would pilfer to sell, give, or exchange with us for money, sassafras, or furs. But when they departed, there remained neither tavern, beer house, nor place of relief but the common kettle. After twenty-six weeks in the ship's hold, our wheat and barley contained as many worms as grains; our drink was water, our lodgings castles in the air.

With this lodging and diet, our extreme toil in bearing and planting so strained and bruised us and our continual labor in the extremity of heat had so weakened us that we were miserable.

From May to September, those that escaped lived upon sturgeon and sea crabs. Fifty in this time we buried. But now with all our provision spent, the sturgeon gone, all helps abandoned, each hour expecting the fury of the savages; when God, the patron of all good endeavors, in that desperate extremity so changed the hearts of the savages that they brought such plenty of their fruits and provision as no man wanted.

And now where some affirmed it was ill done of the Council to send forth men so badly provided, this incontradictable reason will show them plainly they are too ill advised to nourish such ill conceits. First, the fault of our going was our own; what could be thought fitting or necessary we had, but what we should find, or want, or where we should be, we were all ignorant and supposing to make our passage in two months, with victual to live and the advantage of the spring to work; we were at sea five months where we both spent our victual and lost the opportunity of the time and season to plant.

The new President, being little beloved, of weak judgment in dangers, and less industry in peace, committed the managing of all things abroad to Captain Smith, who, by his own example, good words, and fair promises, set some to mow, others to bind thatch, some to build houses, others to thatch them, himself always bearing the greatest task for his own share, so that in short time he provided most of them lodgings, neglecting any for himself...

Leading an expedition on the Chickahominy River, Captain Smith and his men are attacked by Indians, and Smith is taken prisoner. When the news came to Jamestown much was their sorrow for his loss. Six or seven weeks those barbarians kept him prisoner. He not only

diverted them from surprising the fort, but procured his own liberty, and got himself and his company such estimation amongst them, that those savages admired him.

Captain Smith demanded their captain, and they showed him Openchancanough, King of Pamunkee, to whom he gave a round ivory double compass dial. Much they marveled at the playing of the fly and needle, which they could see so plainly and yet not touch it because of the glass that covered it. They stood amazed at him with admiration.

At last they brought him to Werowocomoc, where was Powhatan, their Emperor. Before a fire upon a seat like a bedstead, he sat covered with a great robe made of raccoon skins. One either hand did sit a young wench of sixteen or eighteen years. Two great stones were brought before Powhatan; then as many as could, laid hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head and being ready with their clubs to beat out his brains, Pocahontas, the King's dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevail, got his head in her arms and laid her own upon his to save him from death; whereat the Emperor was contented he should live ...

Now every once in four or five days, Pocahontas with her attendants brought him so much provision that saved many of their lives, that else for all this had starved with hunger.