



The First Successful English Colonies in America

By 1607, Spain had set up successful colonies from St. Augustine in Florida to Lima, Peru. France had trading posts along the St. Lawrence River in what is now Canada. French, English and Dutch explorers were busy mapping the Atlantic Coast, while fishing ships carried tons of American fish back to Europe. But no Europeans had yet settled on the Atlantic Coast between Canada and Florida. King James I of England took advantage of this situation. Only three years after he became king of England, King James I granted a charter to the London Company to explore and settle the Atlantic Coastal Plain. The purpose of these colonies was to make money for England and to fill up the land so that the Spanish and French could not take it over. The London Company sponsored the first two successful English colonies in America.

Jamestown

The first London Company settlement was established in 1607. A group of about 100 men and boys sailed into Chesapeake Bay. These men had come to find gold, but they found none. The colonists built a fort near a wide river, and named their colony and the river in honor of King James. Captain John Smith had found a site that would protect colonists from Native Americans and Spaniards. Unfortunately, this low, marshy site did not offer protection from mosquitoes, dirty water, or poor soil. Unprepared for life in the wilderness, many colonists died during the early months from hunger and disease. The neighboring Powhatan Indians taught the surviving Jamestown colonists how to hunt, farm, and fish. Pocahontas, the chief's daughter, brought food to the settlers. John Smith imposed strict discipline on the colonists, telling them they could either work or starve.

When Smith returned to England, Jamestown fell apart. The winter of 1609-1610 is called the "Starving Time," because only 60 of the original 300 settlers were still alive by May. One of the survivors, John Rolfe, crossed Native American and West Indies tobacco seeds, producing a new variety that pleased the English taste. The first shipment of this tobacco reached London in 1614. Within a decade it had become Virginia's biggest source of income.

The year 1619 was a year of change in Jamestown. The first African slaves were brought from the West Indies to work on large farms called plantations. The first boatload of 200 women also landed, enabling colonists to start families. In that same year, colonists elected wealthy men to represent them in the House of Burgesses. This legislature was the first example of "representative government" in the English colonies in America.

Plymouth

Thirteen years after colonists first landed at Jamestown, a very different group of English colonists landed on Cape Cod. The group we know as Pilgrims were Puritans who left England because they did not agree with the teachings of the official Church of England. At that time, the king required all English citizens to belong to the Anglican Church, known as the Church of England. In America, the Pilgrims hoped to have the freedom to practice their own Puritan religion.

The London Company gave the Puritans a ship and supplies. In exchange, the colonists agreed to send crops and animal skins to the company for seven years. They were supposed to land in Virginia, near the Jamestown colony. Instead, storms blew the Mayflower off course. When they realized they were landing far away from any other English colonies, the Pilgrim men signed an agreement called the Mayflower Compact. They all agreed to abide by "just and equal laws" drafted by leaders of their own choosing.

The Pilgrims explored the coastline near Cape Cod. They came upon Native American farms, and took corn the native people had stored for the winter. The Pilgrims began to build their settlement during the winter. Nearly half of the settlers died during the first winter from a shortage of food and housing. Neighboring Wampanoag Indians taught the Pilgrims how to survive. According to William Bradford, a Wampanoag named Squanto "directed them how to set their corn, where to take fish, and to procure other commodities, and was also their pilot to bring them to unknown places for their profit ..." By the next fall, the Pilgrims had a plentiful crop of corn, and a growing trade based on furs and lumber.

NOTE: Before the Pilgrims arrived on the Atlantic Coast, contact with explorers and sailors had already doomed the tribes living along the coastline. Smallpox spread like wildfire, wiping out village after village. Some fishing boat captains captured native people, intending to sell them as slaves. Squanto's entire village was dead by the time he returned to his home after escaping slavery at the hands of an English sea captain. Pocahontas died of disease while in England to meet King James.

Student: _____ Period: ____ Date: _____

COMPARING EARLY ENGLISH COLONIES

- After reading the selection on Jamestown colony, summarize in the first column.
- After reading the selection on the Plymouth colony, summarize in the center column.
- After completing the first 2 columns, compare them and write a general statement that is true of both colonies in the “Both” column.

	JAMESTOWN COLONY	PLYMOUTH COLONY	BOTH COLONIES
Population What types of people came?	100 men and boys – not farmers; later women and African slaves	Members of the _____ church; families	English people looking for a better life; small groups
Goals Why did they come?			
Geography Describe the colony’s land and climate.	Coastal plain, forests, humid climate; with	Humid coastline, forest, cold climate	
Hardships What difficulties did they face?			
Relations with Native Americans			
Economy How did they make a living?			
Government Who made the laws for their society?			

SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO COMPARING EARLY ENGLISH COLONIES

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Population What types of people came?	100 men and boys – not farmers; later women and African slaves	Members of the <u> Puritan </u> church; families	English people looking for a better life; small groups
Goals Why did they come?	To find gold	To have freedom and practice their own religion	Neither goal is possible in England
Geography Describe the colony’s land and climate.	Coastal plain, forests, humid climate; with poor soil, dirty water, mosquitoes; hot climate	Humid coastline, forest, cold climate	Humid, coastline, forest
Hardships What difficulties did they face?	Died from hunger & diseases	Off course, landed in wrong spot; many died from shortage of food and housing	Died from lack of food
Relations with Native Americans	Good, Powhatan Indians taught them how to hunt, farm, & fish; also brought them food	Good, Squanto taught them how to survive	Good, Native Americans taught them how to survive
Economy How did they make a living?	Grew tobacco on plantations and sold to the London Company in England	Sold lumber and furs to the London Company in England	Traded with the London Company in England, sold natural resources
Government Who made the laws for their society?	John Smith at first; later elected wealthy men represented colonists in House of Burgesses (the first example of representative government in the colonies)	Under the Mayflower Compact, they elected leaders to make laws for the “good of the colony”	Elected representatives (men only)