

CAST

Narrators A-F

Actor A, playing a sailor returned from the New World

Actor B, boy playing role of a woman

George Percy, Jamestown colonist

Old soldier, close friend of Percy

Edward Wingfield, president of Jamestown in 1607

Christopher Newport, captain of ships sent to found Jamestown in 1607

John Smith, Jamestown president, 1608-1609

Rev. Robert Hunt, chaplain

John Ratcliffe, council member

Gabriel Archer, council member

Daniel Tucker, colonist

Zbigniew Stefański, Polish worker

Jan Bogdan, Polish worker

Sir George Yeardley, governor of Virginia, 1619-1621

Jamestown

Struggle for Survival,

**"We helped save this colony twice! We should have a voice in its government."
The long struggle over voting rights in America began at Jamestown.**

by Mike Cusack



own, Virginia:

Struggle for Rights

ABOUT THIS PLAY

Today, U.S. citizens 18 years or older can vote. We take that right for granted. Yet, throughout our nation's history, many Americans — blacks, women, and young people — have had to struggle to gain that basic right. The first of those struggles took place at Jamestown, Virginia. There, in 1607, the first permanent English colony in America was established. But this bold experiment almost failed.

SCENE 1

Narrator A: In October 1606, at a theater in London, England, the play *Eastward Ho* is being performed.

Actor A: I'm a poor sailor returned from the Western Seas with great tales to tell.

Actor B: Of what?

Actor A: Gold — mountains of it — and jewels. The natives gather ru-

bies and diamonds by the seashore.

Actor B: Where is this place?

Actor A: Virginia in the New World.

George Percy (*in the audience, to a friend*): If only I could go there! I would escape the shame that has been on my family since my cousin Thomas was executed for trying to blow up Parliament.

Old soldier (*whispering*): George, my friend, you're in luck. The Virginia Company is seeking adventurers to set up a colony in the New World. I know one of the men in charge. He is Captain John Smith.

Narrator A: Percy and his friend join the expedition. Fifty-nine of the colonists are gentlemen with no work experience. There are two surgeons, a barber, a tailor, three musicians, and a clergyman on board. There are no women or young children. Of the 105 men and boys who set sail for Virginia in the small ships *Su-*

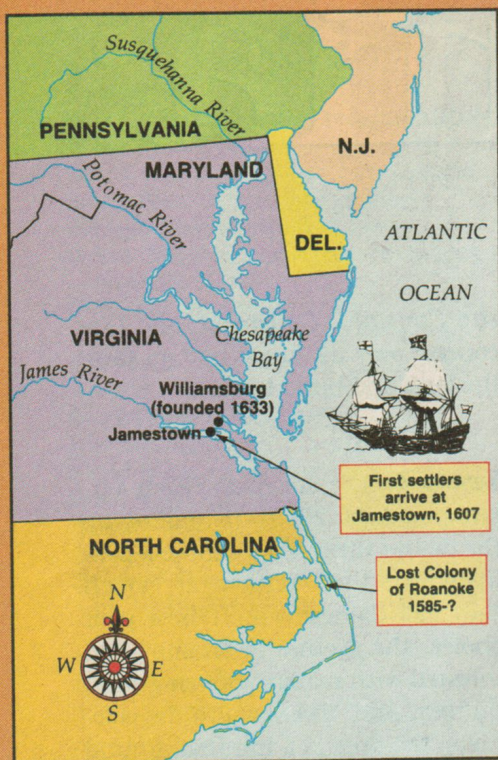
san Constant, *Godspeed*, and *Discovery*, only 32 know how to farm the land and build homes.

SCENE 2

Narrator B: The colonists reach Virginia on April 26, 1607. Sailing up the James River, they choose a peninsula for their settlement, which they call Jamestown. It is a poor choice: the ground is swampy and infested with malaria-carrying mosquitoes. And, unknown to the colonists, the area is a hunting ground of Indians led by Chief Powhatan (*pow-huh-TAN*). Indian attacks force the colonists to take time out from farming and gold prospecting to build a fort. This is a sore point between President Edward Wingfield, who wants to find gold, and John Smith, who wants to make the colony secure.

Wingfield (*addressing the Council*):





Jim McMahon

Jamestown was England's first permanent colony in America.

Gentlemen, the directors of the Virginia Company will be angry when our ships return to England without gold. But we can't keep Captain Newport here much longer. We need new supplies of food, seed, and building materials before winter.

John Smith: And more settlers.

Wingfield: More settlers will mean more mouths to feed.

Smith: If this colony is to survive, we must have skilled workers to make all the things the colony needs.

Wingfield: What's wrong with the men we have?

Smith: Most don't know what a day's work is!

Newport: Where will I find your skilled workers? I can't scout England for people and still sail back here before winter.

Smith: Go to the Polish and German communities in London. They have skilled workers who can make tar, glass, tools, and build houses.

Wingfield: But this colony has an "English only" rule.

Smith: Change the rule, or I leave.

Narrator B: The Council changes the rule. Smith tries to set an example

by working hard at every job. But while on an exploration expedition, he is captured by the Indians, who fear that the English will take over their land. Chief Powhatan orders Smith killed, but the chief's daughter, Pocahontas, saves his life.

SCENE 3

Narrator C: January 1608. The Jamestown colony appears doomed. No supplies have arrived. Only 38 settlers are left.

Hunt: We're sick and hungry. Some of the gentlemen want to be excused from hard labor.

Smith: You know my rule. Those who don't work, don't eat.

Percy: Look! There is a ship in sight.

Hunt: We're saved!

Narrator C: Several ships arrive that year. One brings the colony's first women settlers. Another brings Polish and German skilled workers. All bring needed supplies.

SCENE 4

Narrator D: Food is fairly plentiful in September 1609. The Polish workers have dug wells, constructed a sawmill, and built a glassmaking works. The Germans have built sturdy houses. But the colony is divided. The English gentlemen resent being forced to work. Some of the English dislike the Poles and Germans. Some of the colonists are jealous of Smith's success.

Ratcliffe: The man is a tyrant. Gentlemen should not be forced to dig and chop. They should be free to hunt and fight Indians.

Archer: Smith favors the Poles over us Englishmen. He talks to them in their own language. He learned it when he was a hired soldier for their king.

Newport: He wants me to sail to England right away to fetch more supplies and settlers. He forgets that our instructions are to find gold for the investors back in London. This colony must pay for itself.

Narrator D: Smith is badly wounded by a gunpowder explosion. Not sure whether it was an accident or a plot,

he decides to return to England.

Stefański: Life will be miserable here without Captain Smith to protect us. It's time for us Poles to leave.

Bogdan: Can the colony get along without us?

Stefański: Why not? Last summer we found only misery and 38 hungry men here. Now we are leaving nearly 500 healthy people, well-supplied, well-housed, and well-defended.

SCENE 5

Narrator E: Without Smith and his foreign workers, Jamestown falls on hard times. The colonists fight with the Indians. Crops fail. During the terrible winter of 1609-1610, the "Starving Time," people eat anything to stay alive, even rats and mice. Some turn to cannibalism. By spring, only 59 colonists are alive. But on May 15, 1610, an English supply ship sails into the harbor.

Tucker: Thanks be to God. The "Starving Time" is over. We've been saved!

Percy: We were saved before, but it didn't last. We need more than supplies to keep this colony going.

Tucker: A sailor told me that many more ships are on their way, bringing hundreds of settlers.

Percy: I hope most are farmers and builders. We don't need more jewelers, clerks, barbers, or musicians.

Archer (rushes up): The Poles are back. Stefański, Bogdan, and most of the crowd that left with Smith are here, as well as several new ones.

Percy: The Poles helped save us before. Maybe they can do it again.

Archer (angrily): But you don't understand. They're bringing wives. If they stay, this will no longer be an all-English colony.

Percy (as Archer turns to walk away): What's so bad about that? This is a new world!

Narrator E: Through the hard work of the new settlers, the colony grows and prospers. One of the new English settlers, John Rolfe — who later marries Pocahontas — develops a cash crop for sale in England. That crop is tobacco.

SCENE 6

Narrator F: The time is April 1619. Jamestown now has 11 settlements with a population of more than 2,000. Food is plentiful. The sale of tobacco to England provides money for the colonists and profits for the Company. Sir George Yeardley, a former Jamestown leader, arrives with good news.

Yeardley: The Virginia Company is pleased with the progress here. Therefore, the Company and the King's government have decided that English democracy should come to Virginia.

Percy: What does that mean?

Yeardley: I will be governor. You will elect a representative assembly, named the House of Burgesses, to make the laws. Every adult English freeman in Virginia will have the right to vote.

Stefański: Will only Englishmen have the right to vote?

Yeardley: That's right.

Stefański: But that's not fair.

Bogdan: We helped save this colony twice. We should have a voice in its government.

Yeardley: I can't help that.

Bogdan: You are the governor of Virginia. You can rule in our favor or you can send our complaint to the Royal Court in London.

Stefański: From this day on, the Poles in this colony will do no work until justice is done.

Narrator F: The more than 50 Polish



The first settlers at Jamestown were men and boys. The arrival of women colonists in 1608 was a cause for celebration.

colonists in Virginia go on strike. Several English colonists join the protest. Governor Yeardley sends Stefański's complaint to London. There, the Royal Court rules that the Poles in Virginia should have equal rights with Englishmen.

AFTERWORD

The Royal Court's ruling cleared the way for the first free election in America. On July 30, 1619, the first democratic assembly in the New World met in Jamestown.

From that beginning, democratic government got its start in America. But Americans had to struggle for many years to win the right of all citizens to vote (see below). ☆

Think About It

1. Why did some people leave their homes to become colonists in the New World?
2. Some colonists called John Smith a tyrant. Do you agree? How did he help save Jamestown?
3. Local Indians lived in the Jamestown area. Did the English have the right to claim their land?
4. Some of the English gentlemen refused to work. What does that say about 17th-century England? Why did they resent the Poles?

Who Should Vote?

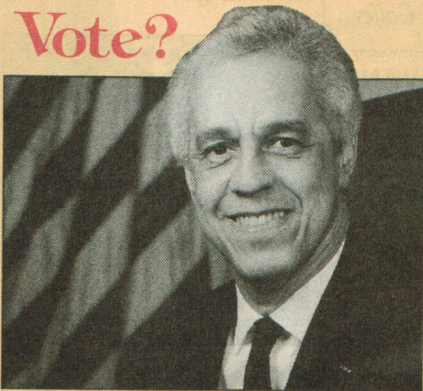


Photo: Governor's Office VA

The struggle over voting rights that began at Jamestown continued for hundreds of years. The U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1789, gave states the right to decide who could vote. At first, most states allowed only white male property owners to vote.

In 1870, the 15th Amendment was ratified. It said that states could not deny anyone the right to vote based on race or color. But in fact, literacy tests and special poll taxes often were used to deny the vote to blacks and poor people long after 1870.

In 1920, the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote. In 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which ensured the vote to *all* citizens over 21. And in 1971, the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18.

Last year, Virginia — where the struggle over voting rights began — elected Douglas Wilder (photo, left) the first black governor in the country. The struggle for voting rights and equality have come a long way since the Jamestown colony. ☆