

Reinterpreting the Virginia Plantation, 1609–1618

Edmond Smith 

Abstract Using evidence from underused manuscript and archaeological material as well as printed texts, the author demonstrates that the early Virginia plantation was far from a disaster. Focusing on the period 1609–1618, the author situates the colony within the globally connected environments of early modern trade and empire. The author reveals how the expectations of the colony’s proponents were met on a variety of levels, and the colony was successfully undertaken through the mediation of global pressures and English corporate culture within the specific local spaces of North America. The Virginia plantation was self-sufficient, economically diverse, and integrated conceptually and practically into the wider activities of its investors and leadership. Through this interpretation, this article contributes to the understanding of practices of colonization in early modern America and the connectedness of English overseas activities and the awareness of the Virginia Company participants’ of the colony’s place within wider, global economies.

Historians often present the early history of Virginia as a tale of despair, focusing on early challenges and starvation or looking forward to the collapse of the Virginia Company and a plantation culture built on tobacco and slavery.¹ Yet during the period between 1609 and 1618, a corporate and collaborative grouping of English merchants, landowners, and other investors built something that was unique in the early history of Britain’s emerging empire.² In this time, the Virginia Company established up to six settlements and numerous local industries, developed farming and husbandry, built ships, grew tobacco, imported a range of commodities, and awarded a huge dividend in seized land to investors. Rather than founding an English settlement as a hub for maritime activity, a trading entrepôt, or a mining or cash-crop economy, the leaders of the company sought to establish a plantation that would do all of these things. In this way, the plantation would add another strand to an already considerable global web of

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¹ The colony’s history between its foundation, consequent conflict, struggles with starvation (1606–1609, including what is widely termed the “starving time,” 1608–1609), and the Powhatan attack in 1622 has received limited attention from historians despite active engagement from archaeologists, whose work I draw upon throughout this article.

² Corporations were versatile, flexible organizational tools: see Phil Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005).

trade, exploration, and privateering carried out by English actors.³ Placing the colony within this connected context refocuses attention on the expectations of the plantation's investors and managers and supports a reinterpretation this period of colonization and empire.⁴ From this perspective, it is more evident that the Virginia plantation was conceived and managed and how, by many measures its leaders would have used, it was a success.

Assessing the Virginia Company through the lens of the connections and collaboration that its corporate structure entails examining the colony as part of multiple and entangled networks.⁵ The plantation was just one of the many commercial activities of its investors, who understood the colony in relation to their global connections and interests.⁶ Indeed, in England, corporations facilitated a useful institutional framework for overseas activities precisely because they were integrative, porous organizations attracting expertise from across a broad spectrum of commercial society and drawing upon their experiences to organize new ventures.⁷ Recognizing these relationships, I take, in the words of Sebastian Conrad, “the interconnected world as its point of departure,”⁸ and in so doing I bring into focus the development of the colony within the wider milieu of English overseas activity. Indeed, viewing the Virginia colony as part of the connected global interests and experiences of its supporters, settlers, and leaders requires reexamining long-held beliefs about the early history of the Virginia plantation.

Looking outward from Virginia also allows historians to build on work that positions the colony within an entangled Atlantic world, drawing together histories of colonization and trade and highlighting the ways in which North American settlement was shaped by networks reaching into Europe, the Mediterranean, and Asia.⁹ Much activity relating to Virginia was of course geographically located in the Atlantic, but situating the colony within broader histories of exchange reveals

³ For connections across these activities, see Edmond Smith, “The Global Interests of London’s Commercial Community, 1599–1625: Investment in the East India Company,” *Economic History Review* 71, no. 4 (2018): 1118–46.

⁴ Between 1609 and 1618, management of the Virginia Company was by collaborative agreement between merchants and gentry investors. After 1618, the removal of Sir Thomas Smith as treasurer (the highest office in the company) and start of Edwin Sandys’s leadership radically altered the governance and direction of the corporation and colony until its dissolution in 1624. After 1618, fractious relations between previous leaders and Sandys’s supporters are clear in the extant records of the Virginia Company; see Susan Myra Kingsbury, *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, vols. 2–4 (Washington, DC, 1906). For an overview of Sandys’s administration, see Theodore K. Rabb, *Jacobean Gentleman: Sir Edwin Sandys, 1561–1629* (Princeton, 1998). Sandys attempted a similar takeover in the East India Company but was unsuccessful; see Court of Committees of the East India Company, 2 July 1619, British Library, London, IOR/B/6.

⁵ James Belich et al., eds., *The Prospect of Global History* (Oxford, 2016), 4–5.

⁶ Huw V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid, eds., *Britain’s Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean World, c. 1550–1850* (Cambridge, 2012); Jonathan Eacott, *Selling Empire: India in the Making of Britain and America, 1600–1830* (Williamsburg, 2016).

⁷ William Pettigrew, “Corporate Constitutionalism and the Dialogue between the Global and the Local in Seventeenth-Century English History,” *Itinerario* 39, no. 3 (2015): 487–501. For the relationships between corporations, politics, and culture, see Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (Oxford, 2011); Henry S. Turner, *The Corporate Commonwealth: Pluralism and Political Fictions in England, 1516–1651* (Chicago, 2016).

⁸ Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, 2016), 5.

⁹ Jack P. Greene and Philip Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford, 2009).

how it depended on and was shaped by connections elsewhere.¹⁰ It also enables further consideration of the structures and processes that mediated between the global and local in Virginia's early history—and how corporate governance presented a means of doing so.¹¹ Recent studies have sought to integrate the colony's development into histories of the Atlantic world, with arguments connecting Virginia to Ireland or the Caribbean both offering important perspectives.¹² Peter Mancall, in particular, has contributed to a shift in positioning Virginia within a wider context and has drawn attention to the impact the movement of ideas, goods, and people had on the development of the colony. Entanglements between the empires of Spain, Portugal, France, the United Provinces, and England helped facilitate the passage of information about the New World.¹³ Such contributions offer a critical reassessment of Virginia's early history and, by drawing on the colony's Atlantic connections, highlight the importance of embedding the colony within a broader context. This article takes these connections further still by highlighting and drawing out the most common experiences of the Virginia Company's leadership in the East India, Levant, and Spanish companies.

The company's leaders in England and its commanders in Virginia, many of whom drew on experience serving overseas, had a considerable impact both in terms of how wider interests shaped the plantation's productive and commercial development and how they influenced its material culture and built environment. Jonathan Eacott, for instance, has shown how early English colonists in Virginia developed a political-economic vision that was, in part, influenced by their thinking about India and so highlighted the need for both commerce and cultivation in the American plantation.¹⁴ As discussed below, the colony's promoters envisioned a plantation that would align with many of the agendas presented by humanist writers of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and with information that had been shared by travelers.¹⁵ In addition, the governance of both the company and colony was informed by practices of civic imperialism that in the 1610s were taking shape in colonies in Ireland and by a competitive corporate environment in England that helped generate new ideas about these organizations' changing role in society and the economy.¹⁶

¹⁰ This concept was most successfully demonstrated by Alison Games in *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford, 2008).

¹¹ Edmond Smith, *Merchants: The Community That Shaped England's Trade and Empire, 1550–1650* (London, 2021), 57–95.

¹² Philip D. Morgan, "Virginia's Other Prototype: The Caribbean," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550–1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill, 2007), 342–82; Audrey Horning, *Ireland in the Virginian Sea: Colonialism in the British Atlantic* (Chapel Hill, 2013).

¹³ Mancall, *Atlantic World and Virginia*; Jorge Cañizares-Esquerria, ed., *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500–1830* (Philadelphia, 2018).

¹⁴ Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 14–33.

¹⁵ For humanist ideas, see David Armitage, "The Elizabethan Idea of Empire," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, no. 14 (2004): 269–77. For the influence of travelers' accounts, see Ivo Kamps and J. G. Singh, eds., *Travel Knowledge: European "Discoveries" in the Early Modern Period* (New York, 2001); Lauren Working, *The Making of an Imperial Polity: Civility and America in the Jacobean Metropolis* (Cambridge, 2020).

¹⁶ For the Irish colonies, see Ian Archer, "The City of London and the Ulster Plantation," in *The Plantation of Ulster: Ideology and Practice*, ed. Éamonn Ó Ciardha and Michael Ó Siochrú (Manchester, 2012), 78–97; T. W. Moody, *The Londonderry Plantation, 1609–1641: The City of London and the Plantation in Ulster* (Belfast, 1939); Jane Ohlmeyer, "Seventeenth-Century Ireland and the New British and Atlantic

These diverse inputs have rarely been presented as contributing effectively to the development of the plantation. Nicholas Canny dismissed the colony as part of “trial-and-error efforts” to establish empire that received little support from the crown or the public.¹⁷ Jack Greene’s focus on how “new colonial peripheries in America” were “relatively autonomous centres of European power effectively under local control” similarly sidelines the involvement of corporate leadership in the development of the colony.¹⁸ Both Wesley Craven’s and Robert Brenner’s interpretations of the company’s failings center on the idea that its leaders “approached the west with something of the same hopes and methods with which they plied their trade in India, the Levant, and the Baltic.”¹⁹ Even while highlighting the role that traders played in managing the company during this period, Brenner dismisses their mercantile interest in the plantation, suggesting they did not expect “meaningful profit” and merely invested out of a “sense of duty.”²⁰ While duty may well have been one incentive, the corporation’s leaders would almost certainly have sought to make the company a success—for personal profit, for the public good, for their understanding of imperial competition, and on religious grounds.²¹ Brenner’s assumption that “the entrepreneurs behind American colonial companies of this period achieved neither organizational stability nor financial success” is problematic and has skewed understanding of merchant involvement in Virginia and the development of the colony itself, and how it fits into broader histories of empire.²² In fact, the Virginia plantation developed in line with many of the expectations and orders issued by its corporate leadership.

A major challenge facing historians regarding this period is a relative dearth of sources. Problematic printed accounts created on behalf of the Virginia Company or its detractors represent the most detailed accounts of the plantation, but these also served promotional or antagonistic objectives. Therefore, I draw on these materials in conjunction with archaeological material, private correspondence, and the

Histories,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (1999): 446–62. For collaboration and competition between corporations, see Pettigrew, “Corporate Constitutionalism”; Smith, *Merchants*, 96–159.

¹⁷ Nicholas Canny, introduction to *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Empire to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford, 1998), 1–32, at 32.

¹⁸ Jack P. Greene, “The Redefinition of Colonization and the Redefinition of Empire in the Early Modern Era: The British-American Experience,” in *Negotiated Empires: Centres and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820*, ed. Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (New York, 2002), 267–82, at 270.

¹⁹ Wesley Craven, *Dissolution of the Virginia Company: The Failure of a Colonial Experiment* (New York, 1932), 26. See also Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London’s Overseas Traders, 1550–1563* (London, 2003), 92–93.

²⁰ Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 107.

²¹ Intellectual and political influences on colonization in the Atlantic have been widely examined, albeit with considerable focus on elite literature and gentry participants. See David Armitage, “Literature and Empire,” in Canny, *Origins of Empire*, 99–123, at 110; Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America: An Intellectual History of English Colonisation, 1500–1625* (Cambridge, 2003), 14, 67–68; Alexander B. Haskell, *For God, King and People: Forging Commonwealth Bonds in Renaissance Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 2017), 12–21. Counter to this trend, similar questions have been examined from a social historical perspective; see Misha Ewen, “‘To the Foundation of a Commonwealth’: English Society and the Colonisation of Virginia, c. 1607–1642” (PhD diss., University College London, 2017); Phil Withington, *Society in Early Modern England: The Vernacular Origins of Some Powerful Ideas* (Cambridge, 2010).

²² Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 92. The loss of the first two court books (the official records of the Virginia Company) covering 1606–1619 has exacerbated this problem.

company's few surviving records to interpret both the printed texts and the history of the colony more effectively. Doing so allows reassessment of traditional narratives of colonial failure in Virginia that have subsumed the colony's early history into the post-1619 period—a teleological approach that warps studies of the earlier plantation.²³ Thus, in examining the varied interests of the company's members, I assess the promotional material produced to elicit support for the Virginia Company, highlighting how the colony's proponents understood its potential for success in terms of its placement alongside a range of global processes; systematically reassess the colony's development between 1610 and 1616 to uncover the ways in which the interests, expertise, and expectations of the corporation's leadership were brought to fruition in Virginia; and consider the place of the colony within England's wider trading networks in the years leading up to 1618, after which corporate leadership changed. This connected approach to the history of the colony allows me to shed new light on the early history of the Virginia colony and the development of English settlement in North America.

INVESTMENT IN THE VIRGINIA PLANTATION

After 1609, the management of the Virginia Company fell largely—though not exclusively—to merchants; “gentleman adventurers . . . withdrew themselves, in despair of the enterprise, and so gave it over, not enduring to repair the ruins, nor to supply what themselves had underwritten.”²⁴ The experiences, relationships, and business practices of Virginia Company members between 1609 and 1618 help illuminate how they governed the colony, revealing its origins, purpose, and success criteria. For experienced investors, Virginia helped diversify their trading portfolios; for first-time investors, it would lead to their support for other far-flung projects. For these investors, Virginia was not detached from England, Europe, or the world; their understanding and experience of global structural, political, and economic change informed how they conceived the Virginia venture and their strategy for undertaking it.

However, analyzing individual investors is not straightforward. While Theodore Rabb and others have used the company's charters to identify its members, they have struggled to clarify which of them maintained their support during the plantation's difficult early years.²⁵ A list of three hundred investors sent by the Virginia Company, along with a letter encouraging investment in 1611, offers an alternative means of assessing ongoing participation.²⁶ The list is the best means of identifying ongoing, creditable investors and helps demonstrate the social backgrounds of investors during this period. It is organized into three sections: knights (101 listed),

²³ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); James Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America* (New York, 2005); Haskell, *For God, King and People*.

²⁴ Virginia Company, *A Brief Declaration of the Present State of Things in Virginia* (London, 1616), 2–3. “Merchants” had a distinct professional identity that separated them from other traders or investors in commercial activity, see Smith, *Merchants*, 14–56.

²⁵ Theodore K. Rabb, *Enterprise and Empire: Merchant and Gentry Investment in the Expansion of England, 1575–1630* (Cambridge, MA, 1967).

²⁶ Copy of a list of investors in the Virginia Company (six names damaged beyond recognition), Kent History and Library Centre, SA/ZB/2/66.

esquires (59), and “citizens and others,” especially merchants (140).²⁷ Knowing who retained their interest in the Virginia Company and their social status presents a starting point for exploring how different types of participants brought different experiences to their involvement in the Virginia plantation that likely shaped how they understood the colony.²⁸

From this list, we learn that the average value of a knight’s investment in the Virginia Company was £68, whereas the average value of an esquire’s investment was £53 and that of citizen members was £49. However, over the course of their lives, knights participated in an average of 2.06 overseas activities—a number higher

²⁷ Merchants are found in all three groups, especially “citizens and others” but so are merchant knights (such as Sir Thomas Smith) and merchant esquires (such as John Eldred).

²⁸ Further data regarding these individuals is taken from the following archival sources: The National Archives, London (hereafter abbreviated as TNA), the British Library, London (hereafter abbreviated as BL), the Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone (hereafter abbreviated as KHLC), and the Company of Merchant Adventurers of York, York. State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth I, TNA SP/12, fols. 1, 12–13, 20, 34, 41–44, 124, 126, 140, 226, 239, 241; State Papers Domestic, James I, TNA, SP/14, fols. 10, 141; Signet Office, King’s Bills, SP/39, fol. 8; State Papers Foreign, Barbary States, TNA SP/71, fols. 12–13; State Papers Foreign, Russia, TNA, SP/91, fol. 2; State Papers Foreign, Archives of British Legations, TNA, SP/105, fols. 110, 143, 147–48; Board of Trade and Secretaries of State, America and West Indies, Original Correspondence, TNA, CO 5/902; Commissions, Instructions, Board of Trade Correspondence, etc., TNA, CO 38/1; East Indies Original Correspondence, Entry Books, etc., TNA, CO/77; Patent Roll, 19 Eliz I: Part 8, TNA, C66/1158, fol. 49; Patent Roll, 21 Eliz I: Part 11, TNA, C66/1185, fols. 21–26; Patent Roll, 25 Eliz I: Part 2, TNA, C66/1224, fol. 17; Patent Roll, 11 Jas I: Part 15, TNA, C66/1992, fol. 5; Patent Roll, 13 Jas I: Part 13, TNA, C66/2068, fol. 18; Patent Roll, 21 Jas I: Part 19, TNA, C66/2313, fol. 7. Records and papers (originals and copies) concerning England and Russia, Greece, Turkey, Venice and Morocco, BL, Cotton MS, Nero B 8; Records and papers (originals and copies) concerning England, Germany and Hungary, BL, Cotton MS, Nero B 9; Papers relating to the Hanse, BL, Cotton MS, Nero B 10; Records and papers (originals and copies) concerning England and Turkey, Abyssinia, Constantinople, Morocco and Russia, BL, Cotton MS, Nero B 11; Burghley Papers, BL, Lansdowne MS, 3, 10, 13, 30, 60, 86, 112; A collection of Admiralty and Commercial Papers, BL, Lansdowne MS 142; A Volume relating to Claims in the Admiralty Court on the part of Germany and the Low Countries, BL, Lansdowne MS 150; A similar volume to the last preceding, BL, Lansdowne MS 487; Transcripts of tracts and papers relating to Trade, Parliamentary and Legal Procedure and State affairs, BL, Stowe MS 303. Memoranda and papers relating to differences between Old and New Companies of Merchant Adventurers, KHLC, U269/1/B82/14, fol. 689. Dispute regarding the membership of the Eastland Company, Company of Merchant Adventurers of York, 1/5/3/5/1–7; Acts and Ordinances of Eastland Merchants, Company of Merchant Adventurers of York (no catalogue reference); Miscellaneous Assessments and Accounts, Company of Merchant Adventurers of York (no catalogue reference). For data from printed material, see Richard Hakluyt, ed., *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation Made by Sea or Ouer-land*, 3 vols. (London, 1598–1600), 1:73–92, 304–16; Cecil T. Carr, ed., *Select Charters of Trading Companies, A.D. 1530–1707* (London, 1913); William Noel Sainsbury, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, East Indies, China and Japan*, vols. 2–6 (London, 1864–1878); Richard Collinson, ed., *The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher: In Search of a Passage to Cathaia and India by the North-West, A. D. 1576–8* (London, 1876); Society of the Governor and Assistants of London of the New Plantation in Ulster, *A Concise View of the Origin, Constitution, and Proceedings of the Honourable Society of the Governor and Assistants of London of the New Plantation in Ulster, Commonly Called the Irish Society* (London, 1832); Charles Deane, ed., *Records of the Council for New England* (Cambridge, MA, 1867); J. S. Brewer and W. Bullen, eds., *Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts* (London, 1867–1873); J. H. Lefroy, ed., *Memorials of the Discovery and Early Settlement of the Bermudas or Somers Islands, 1515–1685* (Hamilton, 1981); Vernon A. Ives, *The Rich Papers: Letters from Bermuda, 1615–1646* (Toronto, 1984); Rabb, *Enterprise and Empire*; Kenneth Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering: English Privateering during the Spanish War, 1585–1603* (Cambridge, 1964).

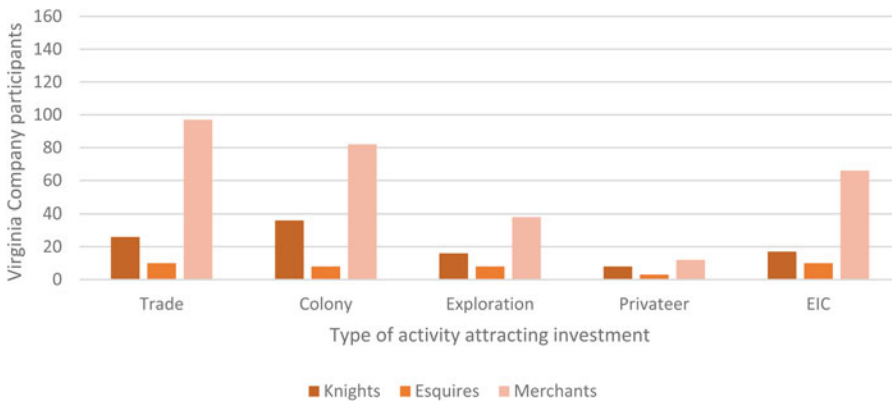


Figure 1—Virginia Company investors' experience, by social status and type of activity.

than that of esquires (1.77) but much lower than that of citizen members (3.16).²⁹ These other activities included exploring for the Northwest passage, trading for spices in the East Indies, privateering in the Caribbean, purchasing furs in Muscovy, and exporting woolen cloth to Europe.³⁰ Across ventures focused on trading, privateering, colonization, and exploration, citizen and merchant investors were more experienced than the knights and esquires put together (figure 1), and Virginia Company members had generally undertaken geographically diverse activities (figure 2).

Of 294 Virginia Company investors identified, ninety had invested prior to joining the company: forty-seven on one occasion, seventeen on two, ten on three, eleven on four, three on five, and two on six.³¹ The East India Company was their most common investment, followed by the Levant and Spanish companies (figure 3).³² While some investors had previously funded exploration, privateering, and even colonies, commercial activities were considerably more common. For instance, John Merrick's first investment was in the Muscovy Company, followed by participation in the East India and Spanish companies, before his £37 10s. investment in the Virginia Company in 1609. Links like these mean it is unsurprising that the Virginia

²⁹ Gentry investors participated in 1.58 activities on average during their careers, merchants in 1.73, according to Rabb, *Enterprise and Empire*, 53–54.

³⁰ However, none of the individuals in this list invested in the Barbary, Eastland, Providence Island, or Hudson's Bay companies.

³¹ The five most experienced investors (Thomas Smith, Thomas Cordell, Nicholas Leate, William Romney, and John Watts) were all merchants. All were named in the East India Company's 1600 charter and had served it as directors; all were members of the Spanish Company; and all except Watts were members of the Levant Company. They all also held senior roles in London's livery companies and were aldermen of the City of London.

³² In addition to the investments represented on the graph (which for ease have been limited to those with at least three investors from the Virginia Company), the citizen Thomas Middleton and knight Arthur Mannering participated in voyages to Guiana; the citizen Thomas Cordell invested in Frobisher's exploratory voyages; knights George Carey and Carew Raleigh helped fund Gilbert's exploratory voyages. Raleigh also participated in the Roanoke colony.

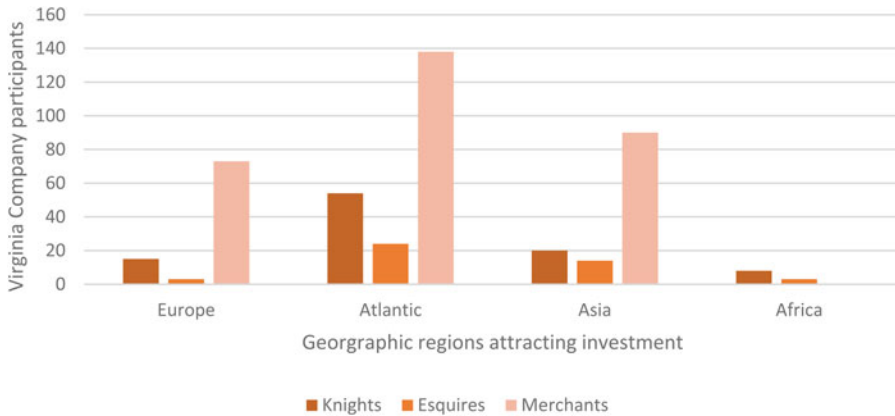


Figure 2—Virginia Company investors’ experience, by social status and geography of activity.

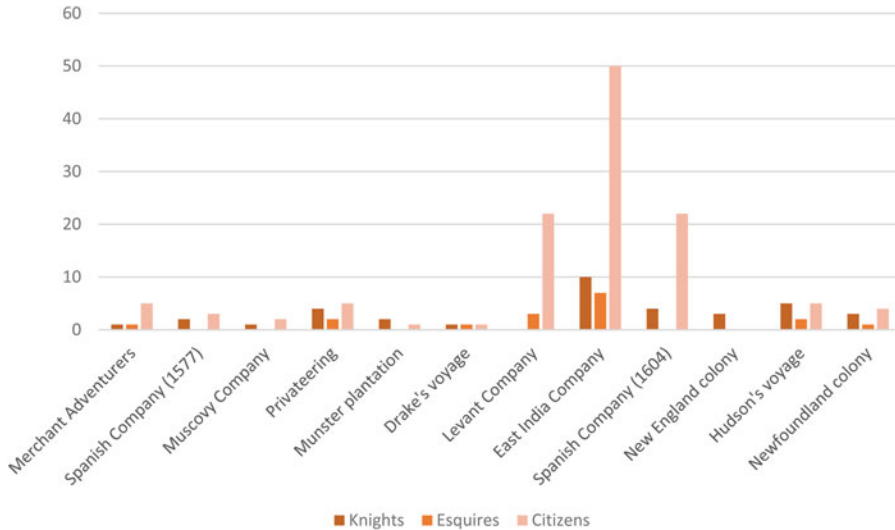


Figure 3—Investments by Virginia Company members before 1610.

Company’s plans emerged in part in relation to its perceived benefits to other trading ventures, such as in providing new markets or shipping materials—while they were also aware of the social and financial benefits of becoming landowners.

After investing in Virginia, 146 of these listed members went on to invest again in other projects. Seventy-five invested once more, forty-two twice, seventeen three times, seven four times, two five times, two six times, and one on seven occasions.³³

³³ The five investors who would go on to invest most were the merchants William Palmer, William Greenwell, Christopher Clitheroe, and Maurice Abbot and the gentleman Dudley Digges. Digges was a prominent corporate supporter and invested in voyages of exploration, other colonial enterprises, and

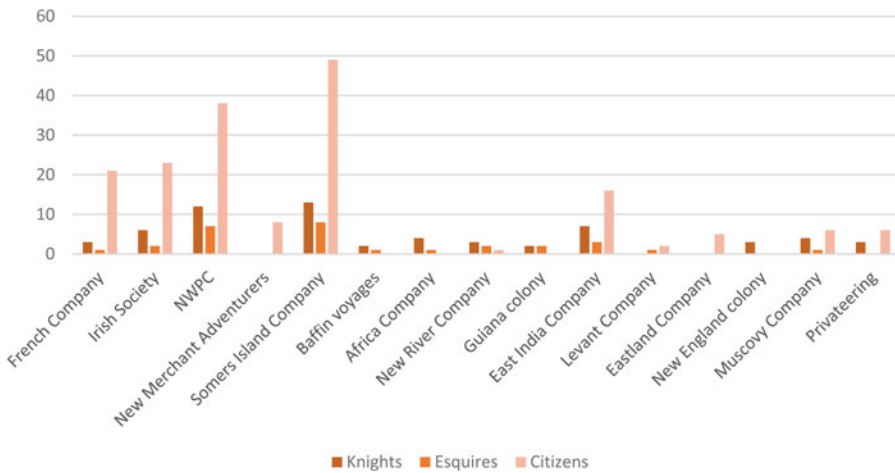


Figure 4—Investments by Virginia Company members after 1610.

This participation in further ventures was effected through diverse portfolios (figure 4). Far from being deterred by their foray into colonial activities, many Virginia Company members invested in the Somers Island Company.³⁴ Others took part in colonial activities in Ireland.³⁵ Further popular investments included the French, East India, and North-West Passage companies. In one illustrative example, the experience of investing in Virginia proved a transformative experience. Abraham Chamberlain, a member of the Merchant Adventurers and Spanish Company before joining the Virginia Company in 1609, went on to invest in Henry Hudson's exploratory voyages and the North-West Passage Company before eventually joining the East India Company in the 1620s. For Chamberlain, the Virginia plantation was a stepping-stone from commercial activities in Europe to a wider global economy.

The proponents of the Virginia plantation and executors of their strategy understood the diverse interests, experiences, and motivations of the company's supporters outlined here. Efforts to develop the colony in Virginia drew on these members' experiences, responding to the specific local conditions in America and integrating the project into international circuits of trade and empire.

the New River Company, all after his investment in the Virginia Company. The four merchants all invested in the French, North-West Passage, and Somers Island companies (they were already members of the Levant, Spanish, and East India companies) and between them participated in the New Merchant Adventurers, Irish Society, and Eastland Company.

³⁴ The Somers Island Company grew from the Virginia Company, which had managed the colonization of the island until 1615; see Lefroy, *Memorials*.

³⁵ Levies on London's livery companies provided the majority of funds for the plantation in Ulster. A small number of merchants also chose to invest independently. See Orders of Court, Clothworkers' Company Archive, London, CL/B/1/4, fols. 49–59; Minute Books, 12 January–November 1610, Draper's Company Archive, London, A, MB 13; Acts of Court, 1595–1629, Mercers Company Archive, London, fols. 97–104; Haberdashers' Company Court of Assistants Minute Book, Guildhall Library, London, CLC/L/HA/B/001/MS15842/001, fol. 170. Links between Irish colonization and Virginia receive considerable attention in Horning, *Ireland in the Virginian Sea*.

PLANNING AND PROMOTING THE VIRGINIA PLANTATION

For the leading members of the Virginia Company, commercial expertise, lives spent in corporate environments, threats of imperial and economic competition, and an awareness of globally connected markets all affected how they conceived the plantation. In promotional literature encouraging investment, this perspective was clear, and the ideal vision of the colony these texts presented shows how the company's leaders framed their enterprise in the context of other mercantile ventures and the embeddedness of the plantation in existing interests of English commercial actors. To meet the needs and expectations of potential investors, the company's plans for the colony took a long-term perspective that required a willingness from participants to wait for returns and highlighted the need for a diversified and connected economy in Virginia.

The company promised prospective investors that the plantation would “augment your glory, or increase your wealth, or purchase your eternity” and distributed detailed texts outlining how the colony would be managed.³⁶ These texts assured readers that the Virginia Company would spread the Gospel, alleviate overpopulation, increase England's might and wealth, and “furnish and provide this Kingdom with all such necessities.”³⁷ The colony was encouraged specifically to provide access to commodities that “cannot be produced at home.”³⁸ Other texts carefully highlighted challenges, urging patience and drawing comparisons with Spain, which lost many “fleets, battalions and armies” in colonizing America.³⁹ Couching the venture in the language of commonwealth and Protestant crusade to highlight the public good, its proponents were nevertheless careful to lay out the possibilities for material gain: long-term profits from rents and industry would serve both investors' purses and the English state and commonwealth.⁴⁰

Orders from the Virginia Company similarly reminded appointed officers to “establish religion” but dedicated considerably more time to instructing them on how to manage the colony.⁴¹ As the company wrote in 1611, “The chiefest thing in our intention . . . is and ought to be the propagation of Christian religion,” but it was “not the first in prosecution”; a self-sufficient colony that could support itself and provide long-term profits was their priority.⁴²

Robert Johnson's *Nova Britannia* of 1609 offers the most useful text for understanding how the company's leadership presented their plans. It includes a lengthy

³⁶ Robert Gray, *A Good Speed to Virginia* (London, 1609), A1–2. As noted above, the list of members used in this article was sent alongside a letter encouraging investment; see KHLIC, SA/ZB/2/64, fol. 87. For English corporations' use of printed literature, see Liam Haydon, *Corporate Culture: National and Transnational Corporations in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (London, 2018).

³⁷ Virginia Company, *A True and Sincere Declaration of the Purpose and Ends of the Plantation Begun in Virginia* (London, 1610), 2–4.

³⁸ Reasons or Motives for Raising of a Public Stock to be Employed for the Peopling and Discovering of New Colonies, 5 January 1608, BL, Lansdowne MS 160, fols. 356–57.

³⁹ Virginia Company, *True and Sincere Declaration*, 17.

⁴⁰ The language of “Protestant Crusade” and the “godly cause” was common in promotional literature; see Horn, *Land as God Made It*, 138–40.

⁴¹ Remembrances to be sent to the Lord Delaware, March 1611, Pepys Library, Cambridge, FP 29. Religious governance also contributed to the social structure of the colony; see Haig Smith, *Religion and Governance in England's Emerging Colonial Empire, 1601–1698* (London, 2021).

⁴² Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30.

moral and legal justification for the colony and an assessment of strategies for developing the plantation.⁴³ In addition to holding a prominent role in the Virginia Company, Johnson was a supplier of Mediterranean products and an investor in the East India Company, and he presented the new plantation in a globally connected trading context familiar to his readers.⁴⁴ For example, in *Nova Britannia*, he suggested that Virginian wines could compete with French ones and Virginian silk might replace “that of Persia, Turkey or any other place” and assured readers that “in searching the land, there is undoubted hope of finding cochineal, the plant of rich indigo, grain berries, beaver hides, pearls, rich treasure, and the south sea, leading to China.”⁴⁵ He also highlighted shipbuilding supplies, which “can hardly now be obtained from any other part of the world.”⁴⁶ Wood was a scarce commodity in England, one that corporations were often accused of wasting, and merchants were under pressure to find alternative sources.⁴⁷ Johnson was confident that Virginian timber would “yield gold or silver in any our bordering nations” and that “about three hundred thousand pounds sterling every year” was spent on similar supplies in England and Holland each year. Timber from the colony would cater to markets in “Hamburg, Holland, or other places,” where it could be sold “fifty per cent better cheap than from Prussia or Polonia, from whence they are only now to be had.”⁴⁸ According to Johnson, materials from Virginia would benefit England and might restructure trade routes across Europe.

These wide-ranging expectations led to instructions from the Virginia Company to its officers that suggest its leaders were unsure what to expect of the colony and happy to experiment. They listed “such things” for export to England as dried sassafras roots, “*sarsapilla* [which] is a root running within the ground like licorice,” a hogshead or two of wine, beaver skins, sturgeon, oak clapboards, and samples of locally produced pitch and tar.⁴⁹ Plans for Virginia were not limited to hopes of mines, privateering, or tobacco, and investors were interested in goods and industries that could support or supplant markets elsewhere. Johnson hoped that through investment, “art and industry,” and “a little patience to bring these things to pass,” the plantation might help England overtake the Dutch, who currently “surpass and go beyond us in continual plenty of corn and shipping.”⁵⁰

Promoters also presented a successful colony as a potential entrepôt for trading with Indigenous people: as Johnson suggested, “when the colony is thoroughly

⁴³ The text was also sent to Spain by Pedro de Zúñiga and partly translated into Spanish. See Don Pedro de Zúñiga to Philip III, 15 March 1609, in Philip L. Barbour, ed., *The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter, 1606–09*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1969), 256.

⁴⁴ Court of Committees of the East India Company, BL, IOR/B/2, fols. 38, 102.

⁴⁵ Robert Johnson, *Nova Britannia* (London, 1609), C3, D3.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Nova Britannia*, C3. For Johnson as a humanist thinker, see Andrew Fitzmaurice, “The Commercial Ideology of Colonization in Jacobean England: Robert Johnson, Giovanni Botero, and the Pursuit of Greatness,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2007): 791–820.

⁴⁷ The East India Company was under particular pressure, leading Dudley Digges to write a counterargument highlighting the company’s profitable use of timber (and mariners). See Dudley Digges, *The Defence of Trade* (London, 1615). On American timber, see Charles F. Carroll, *The Timber Economy of Puritan New England* (Providence, 1974).

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Nova Britannia*, C3.

⁴⁹ Instructions for such things as are to be sent from Virginia, 1610, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 23.

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Nova Britannia*, C4, D1.

increased . . . it will cause a mighty vent of English cloths” and other supplies.⁵¹ Cloth exports, long the bedrock of the English economy, were in decline, and finding new markets was an important incentive for many overseas ventures.⁵² Virginia was only one project contributing to the “lifting up” of the cloth trade already underway, as merchants “willingly engage[d] themselves to undertake all new discoveries, as into this of the West, and by the North-West to find out China, and unto the East beyond the cape, into the Red Sea, the Gulf of Persia, the Straights of Sunda, and among all the kings of India.”⁵³

Trade offered one possibility for profit in Virginia, but for many investors the most valuable item it could offer was land. A self-sufficient and secure colony would enable investors to receive property in America, a promise of long-term returns that would further benefit from agricultural or manufacturing developments in the plantation.⁵⁴ One promotional text highlighted that the Virginia Company “propose[d] to maintain and carry all in a joint-stock for seven years, and then to divide the lands.”⁵⁵ Another assured investors they would receive “lands to them and their heirs forever.”⁵⁶ This offer was attractive, with demand for land in England very high, and investors would have been aware how lucrative land ownership in Virginia might be. Many of them would have known that London’s livery companies relied on property for most of their income and that by 1615, the East Indian Company too had purchased property to provide an additional, reliable revenue stream.⁵⁷ In England, Johnson pointed out, properties “not worth five shillings” thirty or forty years earlier “now do go for forty and more.”⁵⁸ Therefore in Virginia, lands currently uncultivated and insecure “are now worth little indeed, yet time and means will make them better, considering how they pass our grounds in England, both in regard to soil and climate, fit for many precious uses.”⁵⁹ Cheap labor from Indigenous workers employed “for such wages as may please them” would make properties even more valuable.⁶⁰ Settling towns with agricultural hinterlands to support them would also mean that “we shall be soon freed from further expense, our gains will grow and our stock increase, we shall fell our timber, saw our plank, and quickly

⁵¹ Johnson, D3.

⁵² Tom Leng, “‘Corporate Constitutionalism,’ the Merchant Adventurers, and Anglo-European Interaction,” *Itinerario* 39, no. 3 (2015): 509–12.

⁵³ Johnson, *Nova Britannia*, D4.

⁵⁴ This venture differed greatly from contemporaneous American ones that were principally understood as a means of extracting valuable commodities. For example, see Joyce Lorimer, *English and Irish Settlement on the River Amazon, 1550–1646* (London, 1989); Sir John Wentworth to William Trumbull, 3 March 1610, Berkshire Record Office, Reading, Trumbull MS, Miscellaneous Correspondence, vol. 2, p. 53; Grant for Guiana, August 1613, TNA, SO 3/5, fols. 6–8.

⁵⁵ *For the Plantation in Virginia* (London, 1609).

⁵⁶ *Considering there is No Public Action* (London, 1609).

⁵⁷ Court of Committees of the East India Company, BL, IOR/B/5, fol. 467.

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Nova Britannia*, E1. Rents did increase during this period, 1610–1619, from approximately 14d. per acre per year in 1580–89 to 2s. During the period 1610–1619, rents in the southeast of England were slightly higher than average, whereas property in the Midlands and North averaged rents of about 1s. 18d. and 1s. 2d. respectively; see Gregory Clark, “Land Rental Values and the Agrarian Economy: England and Wales, 1500–1914,” *European Review of Economic History* 6, no. 3 (2002): 281–308.

⁵⁹ Johnson, *Nova Britannia*, E1.

⁶⁰ Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30.

make good shipping there.”⁶¹ These developments would create a chain reaction—towns would secure land for agriculture, agriculture would support the towns, towns would develop industries to supply the colony and export goods, and together they would engender a populous new market for English goods.

Virginia presented an opportunity to establish an English settlement to respond to structural changes in the global economy, but it also had to function effectively on a local level.⁶² The leaders of the company did not envision a simple undertaking or quick returns. They understood how ambitious their plans were. As one colonist who wrote an account of his time in Virginia, Richard Rich, put it in 1610, “We hope to plant a nation, where none before has stood.”⁶³

BUILDING AND IMPROVING THE VIRGINIA PLANTATION

The Virginia Company’s hopes for the plantation—a mixed economy with extensive landholdings, military security, trade goods, and a consumer population, which was in a position to act as a commercial entrepôt—contributed to the ways in which it sought to manage the enterprise. It was an approach that would by no means satisfy all the company’s investors, as the later takeover and change in strategy of the company by a faction led by Edwin Sandys would suggest, but it did align with many of the aims presented in promotional literature and with the experience and expertise of company leaders obtained elsewhere across England’s trade and empire. To execute this widely publicized vision, the company appointed carefully selected officers to oversee the settlements. These men were instructed to build a colony that would not depend on England for basic supplies, could feed itself, and had the structures in place to welcome new colonists without disruption. Thomas West, the newly appointed governor, was instructed to start looking for “proofs of some valuable commodities” that might encourage further support, but only after securing food for the colonists. Their immediate interest was best served by the development of a self-sufficient colony.⁶⁴

In 1610, when West first landed in Virginia, after the colony’s disastrous period of starvation in 1608–1609, these plans looked in doubt. Since the first settlement of the colony, poor management had resulted in a perilous period for settlers, with many dying from starvation and the elements. The situation had resulted in changes in the colony’s leadership in 1609, who appointed West to oversee the colony. A few days before West’s arrival in 1610, survivors from an earlier fleet who had only now reached Jamestown “found some three score persons living” in the colony and in recognition of its dire situation had decided to desert the settlement.⁶⁵ To restore and secure the colony, West sent “some to cleanse the town, some to make coal for our forges [and] sent fishermen out to provide fish,” with

⁶¹ Johnson, *Nova Britannia*, E2.

⁶² The Virginia Company’s leadership would have been aware of English factories’ role in Europe, Russia, the Mediterranean, and Asia and been keen to replicate what they saw as successful settlement by the Portuguese in Elmina, Goa, Ormuz, and Malacca; the Spanish in Manilla and across South America; and the Dutch in Batavia.

⁶³ Richard Rich, *The Lost Flock Triumphant* (London, 1610), B–B2.

⁶⁴ Remembrances to Lord Delaware, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 29.

⁶⁵ Silvester Jourdain, *A Discovery of the Bermudas* (London, 1610), 20–21.

others going to Bermuda for hogs.⁶⁶ Cleansing the town removed the detritus of previous failures, allowing a fresh foundation for construction.⁶⁷ West also ordered that the old well be filled and that a new, wood-lined well dug to serve the plantation.⁶⁸

A second large fleet, costing £8,000 and commanded by Thomas Dale, another new appointment intended to take command in the colony, also reached Virginia in May 1611 carrying three hundred settlers with provisions.⁶⁹ By 1611, West reported (and the company published) that Virginia now housed two hundred men, “the most in health, and provided of at least ten months victuals in their storehouse.”⁷⁰ In private correspondence, West further described excellent soil quality and the cultivation of crops, noting signs of profitable output due to “a greater quantity than may easily win belief, [of] vines.”⁷¹ Captain George Yeardley reiterated the plantation’s fertility and good corn harvests.⁷² To capitalize on this momentum, the company “bent all their wits and consultations [to] how to second this good beginning” and decided “without delay to furnish out Sir Thomas Gates with six ships, three hundred men and a hundred kine, with other cattle, munition and provisions of all sorts.”⁷³ These initial, positive activities were widely publicized, and promotional literature assured potential settlers “there is no fear of hunger here” but plentiful land.⁷⁴

Recognizing the challenges that the earlier colony had faced, the Virginia Company turned from early efforts to populate the colony as quickly as possible and focused on obtaining skilled settlers.⁷⁵ A 1610 pamphlet stated, “experience has too dearly taught, how much and many ways it hurts to suffer parents to unburden themselves of lascivious sons, masters of bad servants, and wives of ill husbands, and so to clog the business with such an idle crew.” The company “resolved, that no such unnecessary person shall now be accepted, but only such honest and good artificers.”⁷⁶ The company insisted “that none but honest sufficient artificers, as carpenters, smiths, coopers, fishermen, brickmen, and such like, shall be entertained into this voyage.”⁷⁷ A list of these tradesmen was sent to officers in Virginia so that

⁶⁶ Lord De La Warr to Salisbury, July 1610, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 22. See also Jourdain, *Discovery of the Bermudas*, 21–23.

⁶⁷ Pit 8 and Pit 11, Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation, Jamestown, JR795 and JR1220; William M. Kelso and Beverly Straube, eds., *2000–2006 Interim Report on the APVA Excavations at Jamestown, Virginia* (Richmond, 2008), 25.

⁶⁸ Structure 177, Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation, JR2158. See also Kelso and Straube, *2000–2006 Interim Report*, 68–69.

⁶⁹ Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30.

⁷⁰ Thomas West, *The Relation of the Right Honourable the Lord De-La-Warre* (London, 1611), B2.

⁷¹ Thomas Dale to Earl of Salisbury, 17 August 1611, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 26.

⁷² George Yeardley to Sir Henry Peyton, 18 November 1610, Bodleian Library, Oxford English History MS C4, fol. 3.

⁷³ Robert Johnson, *New Life of Virginea* (London, 1612), 12.

⁷⁴ Rich, *Lost Flock*, B2, B3.

⁷⁵ Blaming earlier difficulties on idle settlers was a common strategy for the Virginia Company; see Johnson, *New Life of Virginea*, 10. See also Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “Apathy and Death in Early Jamestown,” *Journal of American History*, no. 66 (1979): 24–40. The company turned down, for example, the opportunity to send between five hundred and a thousand Irish noblemen to the colony; see Particular Questions Concerning the Plantation, March 1610, TNA, SP 63/228, fol. 172.

⁷⁶ Virginia Company, *Publication by the Councill*.

⁷⁷ Virginia Company, *By the Councill of Virginea* (London, 1610).

“upon view of the list and consideration of their several trades and qualities,” they would “dispose of and employ” such men “immediately upon their arrival.”⁷⁸ In 1610 the company detailed 132 settlers to undertake tasks ranging from identifying mines, planting sugar, and drilling pearls to making salt, tiles, bricks, ploughs, beer, bread, and silk.⁷⁹ Another list from 1611 identified settlers needed for building, farming, ship building, domestic crafts, sailing, fishing, iron working, armaments, and one for medical work.⁸⁰ Although no lists of outgoing settlers survive to attest to the company’s success in this regard, we can nevertheless see clearly its priorities for the plantation: builders and farmers were desired, but supplemented by craftsmen to develop local industries.⁸¹

The company also extended attractive offers to entice skilled settlers. Not only would “men of worth for special services . . . be maintained at the common charge” but they would also “receive their dividend (as others do) at seven years end.”⁸² A lone surviving record from a Virginia Company court meeting from 1612 shows the continuation of policies for attracting settlers. It stated that each settler would receive six months of supplies, “a house and plot of ground for a garden and orchard, and ten acres of ground,” “seed corn to sow his grounds the first year” and swine, poultry, goats, and cattle.⁸³

Considering these efforts, the company leaders informed officers, “it is not to be expected that the adventurers here will be at any more charge (after this year) with victualling the colony.” The company’s leaders envisioned settling “people in a wholesome air” and encouraged them to “use all means for providing sustenance and providing food,” reminding officers that “a main scandal has been raised against that Colony, for want and baseness of food.” It was imperative that a “great store of grain must always be seasonably sown not only to serve the Colony . . . but also such other companies as we shall send thither.”⁸⁴ Cultivating corn, beans, peas, pumpkins, roots, herbs, cabbages, apple trees, and pear trees was recommended, so “that the colony may have plenty of wholesome herbs, roots and fruits which in so hot a climate are of great relief.”⁸⁵ Settlers were also advised to catch and salt fish, helped by skilled fishermen and equipment from England, and to send a boat to Jamaica “for fetching of supplies of calves, goats and swine.”⁸⁶

Company officers took up the challenge of food supply. Dale, now governor, informed the company, “We have built a town in an excellent place, very wholesome and commodious,” and in “the last year I set 80 acres of ground with corn.”⁸⁷ The

⁷⁸ Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30.

⁷⁹ Virginia Company, *True and Sincere Declaration*, 26.

⁸⁰ Sir Thomas Smith to the Mayor of Sandwiche, 28 February 1611, KHLC, SA/ZB/2/64, fol. 87; Sir Edwin Sandys to the Mayor of Sandwiche, 21 March 1611, KHLC, SA/ZB/2/67, fol. 92.

⁸¹ However, that these lists correlate with many of the efforts undertaken in Virginia discussed below suggests the Virginia Company had some success in attracting people from some, if not all, of these specialties.

⁸² Johnson, *Nova Britannia*, D4.

⁸³ Minutes of the Virginia Company, 20 February 1612, Pepys Library, FP 32.

⁸⁴ Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30.

⁸⁵ Remembrances to Lord Delaware, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 29; Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30.

⁸⁶ Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30.

⁸⁷ Thomas Dale to Virginia Company, 10 June 1613, FP 40, Pepys Library.

improvements were soon noted in London, in keeping with the company's expectations, and one member optimistically reported how "this main objection of wanting food is utterly removed."⁸⁸ Another merchant explained how "our plantation in Virginia stands hopeful in many ways" because now "victuals, the chief thing they formerly wanted, they are well furnished" with meat, dairy, fish, and corn.⁸⁹ This private correspondence supports archaeological evidence that the plans were at least partly effective in terms of the increased scale and practices of agriculture and the improved diets of colonists.⁹⁰ Colonists had already begun to adapt their techniques to local conditions and were replicating native slash-and-burn farming techniques to rapidly clear land and increase production.⁹¹ Animal husbandry became important, and large complexes outside Jamestown helped provide a range of dairy products (figure 5).⁹²

Commerce with local Algonquian people also improved the food supply, with trade continuing throughout this period, even during conflicts with the Powhatan.⁹³ It was defined by "bilateral exchange, with goods moving both to and from the English."⁹⁴ For example, when Samuel Argall obtained food and furs from nearby Patawomeke, with whom he exchanged 40s. worth of goods including copper, lead, hatchets, knives, bells, and scissors.⁹⁵ Returning the following year "to fetch corn from Patawomeke, by trading with the Indians," Argall was happy to find "they had good store of corn for me, which they had provided the year before." He purchased 1,100 bushels of corn, soon "delivered into the several store-houses"

⁸⁸ Quoted from Johnson, *New Life of Virginea*, 14. See also John More to William Trumbull, 11 July 1611, Berkshire Record Office, Trumbull MS, Alphabetical Correspondence, vol. 32, p. 32.

⁸⁹ John Woodall to William Trumbull, 7 October 1613, Berkshire Record Office, Trumbull MS, Miscellaneous Correspondence, vol. 5, p. 118.

⁹⁰ William M. Kelso, *Jamestown: The Truth Revealed* (Charlottesville, 2017), 231–33. Archaeological evidence from Jamestown and Jordan's Journey, a settlement founded just after this period, shows increasing consumption of imported fish and agricultural and domesticated animal products alongside continued dependence on hunting wild game. See Joanne Bowen, *Beef, Venison, and Imported Haddock in Colonial Virginia: A Report on the Analysis of Faunal Remains from Jordan's Journey* (Jamestown, 1996); Joanne Bowen and Susan Andrews, *The Starving Time at Jamestown: Faunal Analysis of Pit 1, Pit 3, the Bulwark Ditch, Ditch 6, Ditch 7, and Midden 1* (Jamestown, 2000).

⁹¹ John L. Cotter, *Archaeological Observations at Jamestown* (Washington, DC, 1958), 162–63.

⁹² Alain C. Outlaw, "A 1611 Blockhouse and Earthworks for the Protection of Cattle: Virginia's Earliest Bovine Husbandry, Near Jamestown" (unpublished manuscript), 3 January 2017 (also presented at Society for Historical Archaeology, Fort Worth, 2017). For the wider impact of domesticated animals, see Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (Oxford, 2004).

⁹³ For the structure of Algonquian society and trade, see Martin D. Gallivan, *The Powhatan Landscape: An Archaeological History of the Algonquian Chesapeake* (Gainesville, 2016); Gregory A. Waselkov, Peter H. Wood, and Tom Hatley, eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln, 2007).

⁹⁴ Luke J. Pecoraro and David M. Givens, "Like to Perish from Want of Succour or Relief?: The Provisioning of 17th-Century Virginia during Times of Change," *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 40, no. 2 (2006): 62–79, at 65; Seth Mallios and Beverly Straube, *1999 Interim Report on the APVA Excavations at Jamestown, Virginia* (Richmond, 2000), 29; Kelso and Straube, *2000–2006 Interim Report*, 17, 19; By 1610, English copper had already destabilized local markets; see Seth Mallios and Shane Emmett, "Demand, Supply, and Elasticity in the Copper Trade at Early Jamestown," *Journal of the Jamestown Rediscovery Centre*, no. 2 (2004): 1–4.

⁹⁵ William Strachey, *Historie of Travaile into Virginia Britannia*, BL, Sloane MS no. 1622.



Figure 5—After 1611, dairy production began in Jamestown, as seen from the emergence of cheese strainers in the archaeological record (Surrey-Hampshire Border ware). Courtesy Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation/Preservation Virginia.

newly built in Jamestown.⁹⁶ Other local groups reportedly traded “skins, bowls, maize, baskets, tobacco” with the English.⁹⁷ Patowomeke women may have been living in the English colony, further strengthening ties and integrating local customs and material cultures into the lives of the colonists.⁹⁸ This ongoing commercial contact and mutually beneficial exchange contributed to the integration of the colony into local networks.⁹⁹

Despite these successes, the Virginia Company was drawn into both local and international conflicts. The Spanish, who claimed the North American territory as their own, disputed the colony’s legality; Captain Argall led attacks on French settlements further north, which were intended to facilitate English access to the region’s fur trade but also created further rivalry with the French merchants they sought to supplant.¹⁰⁰ In 1613, Don Diego de Molina, a Spanish prisoner in Virginia, sent a warning to Spain: he hoped “His Majesty will have opened his eyes and seen this new Algiers of America, which is coming into existence here.”¹⁰¹ He believed the colony would soon produce enough corn and livestock to grow exponentially and

⁹⁶ Samuel Argall to Nicholas Hawes, June 1613, in Samuel Purchas, ed., *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625), 1764, 1765.

⁹⁷ Ralph Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia* (London, 1615), 15.

⁹⁸ Mallios and Straube, *1999 Interim Report*, 38.

⁹⁹ Dennis B. Blanton, Stevan C. Pullins, and Veronica L. Deitrick, *The Potomac Creek Site (44ST2) Revisited* (Richmond, 1999), 91.

¹⁰⁰ Pierre Biard to Claude Aquaviva, 26 May 1614, in *Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606–1625*, ed. Lyon Gardiner Tyler (New York, 1907), 228–34; Hamor, *True Discourse*, 36. French complaints conflated Argall’s raid with English whaling in the North Atlantic, suggesting that connections between the activities were not secret. See Privy Council to Sir Thomas Smith, 4 January 1614, TNA, PC 2/27, fol. 116.

¹⁰¹ Algiers was well known for piracy. See Don Diego de Molina to [Don Alonzo de Velasco], 1613, in Tyler, *Narratives*, 218–24.

urged Spain to “stop the progress of a hydra in its infancy, because it is clear that its intention is to grow and encompass the destruction of all the West.”¹⁰² In light of this competitive imperial environment, English fear of European attack led to defensive efforts: West had reportedly built two forts on the coast immediately after his arrival, which Dale had supplemented in 1611 when he planned a fortified settlement at Point Comfort that would “hold open the mouth of our river, to let shipping into us” and enable the plantation to resist any naval blockade.¹⁰³

In addition to being seen as a threat to other Europeans’ enterprises, the colony’s development was threatened more immediately by local conflict with Powhatan (as the leader of the indigenous Powhatan people was known).¹⁰⁴ The company’s new leaders blamed the previous leadership for “alienating of the native people of the country, especially by injuries” that were “an exceedingly great error and has turned to the great hindrance” and “manifold disprofit of the colony.”¹⁰⁵ They hoped their attempts to build bridges would be aided by “the exact observation of justice . . . chiefly in public punishment of such as shall wrong them,” and laws issued in the colony followed these instructions.¹⁰⁶ Strict laws adopted after 1610 sought to protect the colonists from “all wrongful dealing amongst themselves, or injurious violence against the Indians.”¹⁰⁷ Fortifications were also built inland intended to “keep out the savages.”¹⁰⁸ But by 1614, “after five years . . . war with the revengeful, implacable Indians,” they were able to conclude “a firm peace (not again easily to be broken),” leading witnesses to hope there was now “no reason why the colony should not thrive apace.”¹⁰⁹ The news was well received in England, and the merchant Thomas Woodall rejoiced the plantation’s now being “in amity as you no doubt have heard with the natives.”¹¹⁰ Peace with Powhatan presented the opportunity for further expansion in terms of land acquisition, population growth, and commercial opportunities.¹¹¹

During the years of conflict, the colony had already seized and settled lands across the James River valley.¹¹² Expansion reputedly led to plans for “three or four ploughs

¹⁰² Don Diego de Molina to [Don Alonzo de Velasco], 1613, in Tyler, *Narratives*, 218–24.

¹⁰³ West, *Relation of the Right Honourable the Lord De-La-Warre*, B3. Quotation from Thomas Dale to Earl of Salisbury, 17 August 1611, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 26.

¹⁰⁴ For relations between the colony and Powhatan, see Horn, *A Land as God Made It*, 180–239.

¹⁰⁵ Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30.

¹⁰⁶ Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30. See also William Strachey, *For the Colony in Virginea Britannia: Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall* (London, 1612), 7.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, *New Life of Virginea*, 13; Strachey, *For the Colony in Virginea Britannia*. Strict martial law has been used to explain the supposed failure of the colony; see Craven, *Dissolution*; John M. Collins, *Martial Law and English Laws, c. 1500–c. 1700* (Cambridge, 2016), 97–103. Martial law was also used by Walter Raleigh in South America and by the East India Company; see Sir Walter Raleigh Commission, 26 August 1616, TNA, PSO/5/3, fol. 51; Captain Lancaster his Commission, BL, IOR/B/2, fols. 1–2.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Dale to Virginia Company, 10 June 1613, Pepys Library, FP 40. See also Thomas Dale to Earl of Salisbury, 17 August 1611, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 26.

¹⁰⁹ Hamor, *True Discourse*, 2, 11.

¹¹⁰ John Woodall to William Trumbull, 6 July 1615, Berkshire Record Office. Trumbull MS, Miscellaneous Correspondence, vol. 7, p. 49.

¹¹¹ The colony’s trade also crossed the boundaries of other European empires active in the region; see April Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia, 2007).

¹¹² Archaeological surveys indicate that much of the 1,500-acre island was used by the colony; see Dennis Blanton, Patricia Kandle, and Charles M. Downing, *Archaeological Survey of Jamestown Island* (Williamsburg, 2000), 2, 85–160, 214.

going,” hoping that “in short time” the colony would “be able to repay England the corn they have lent us.”¹¹³ The colonist Ralph Hamor credited this progress to the division of labor, whereby each settler was given three acres of land for private use and in returned provided labor for one month each year and supplied “into the store two barrels and a half of corn: there to be reserved to keep new men.”¹¹⁴ Even John Rolfe’s often-critical account reported the plantation’s agricultural success, describing regulations that required each settler to “yearly manure, set and maintain for himself and every manservant two acres of ground with corn” before planting any tobacco.¹¹⁵ Crop surplus led to Algonquian peoples coming to the plantation to trade for corn, a dramatic reversal from only a few years earlier.¹¹⁶ Maintaining agricultural output while planting cash crops was essential, and the colony’s success was reported widely.¹¹⁷ Increasing output also helped support new towns and their nascent industries—the largest at Henrico eighty miles upriver from Jamestown in “a place of higher ground, strong and defensible by nature, a good air, wholesome and clear.”¹¹⁸ Here, colonists reportedly “impaled” (palisaded) seven acres of ground “in a manner secured from the Indians” and constructed watchtowers, a church, and storehouses.¹¹⁹ By 1615, one merchant described the colony as well fortified and settled on both sides of the James River.¹²⁰ When Rolfe left Virginia in 1616, he reported six settlements: Henrico, Bermuda City, West and Sherley, Jamestown, Kequoughtan, and Dales Gift (at Cape Comfort). Each had a specific role: one was “maintained by the colony” in return for making salt; another focused on tobacco; and settlers in a third, Rolfe wrote, “labour generally for the colony, amongst whom, some make pitch and tar, pot-ashes, charcoal, and other works.”¹²¹

In these new settlements, the Virginia Company’s leaders sought to shape the built environment to provide for the colonists and create the foundations of a civic-law-abiding society.¹²² For instance, they encouraged that “persons be appointed as

¹¹³ Hamor, *True Discourse*, 23.

¹¹⁴ Hamor, 17.

¹¹⁵ Rolfe, *True Relation*, 37–38. Edmund Morgan has suggested that this arrangement led to limited growth in tobacco production, in “The First American Boom: Virginia 1618 to 1630,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1971): 169–98. Similar strategies were employed in Massachusetts where small farmsteads were encouraged in advance of cash crops; see James E. Williams, *Building the Bay Colony: Local Economy and Culture in Early Massachusetts* (Charlottesville, 2007), 7–21.

¹¹⁶ Rolfe, *True Relation*, 36.

¹¹⁷ The news even reached India, where Thomas Roe, ambassador to the Great Mughal, was kept updated on important affairs by Lord Carew; see Lord Carew to Thomas Roe, 18 January 1617, TNA, SP 14/90, fol. 35.

¹¹⁸ Johnson, *New Life of Virginea*, 13–14.

¹¹⁹ Hamor, *True Discourse*, 29. See also Thomas Dale to Earl of Salisbury, 17 August 1611, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 26. The growth of new towns also explains the growing demand for builders as seen in settler criteria drawn up by the company; see Sir Edwin Sandys to the Mayor of Sandwich, 8 April 1612, KHL, SA/ZB/2/67, fol. 92.

¹²⁰ John Woodall to William Trumbull, 6 July 1615, Berkshire Record Office, Trumbull MS, Miscellaneous Correspondence, vol. 7, p. 49.

¹²¹ Rolfe, *True Relation*, 39.

¹²² The relationship between urban planning and colonization has been explored by Paul Musselwhite, *Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth: The Rise of Plantation Society in the Chesapeake* (Chicago, 2018). For the shift from strict corporate organization to a less hierarchical society, see Sigmund Diamond, “From Organization to Society: Virginia in the Seventeenth Century,” *American Journal of Sociology* 63, no. 5 (1958): 457–75.

officers in every company to see that their cabins and lodgings be kept cleanly and healthily” and suggested settlers “have their diet at communal tables by companies after the fashion of the old world.”¹²³ Changing material culture in the colony suggests this latter practice was adopted, with larger vessels for cooking and serving food marking a distinct break from the pre-1610 period (figure 6). Cooking was undertaken in larger complexes that fed larger groups of colonists at a time.¹²⁴ Efforts to recreate an urban environment also affected architectural design, where mud-and-stud buildings reminiscent of rural Lincolnshire were torn down and replaced with row houses similar to those in English towns and cities.¹²⁵

The colony’s settlements were more than simple farmsteads, and the Virginia Company’s control of territory was reinforced as residential, civic, religious, and industrial buildings transformed the landscape. These local facilities enabled the colony to function independently locally and helped its supporters argue for integrating the colony into the global economy. These mutually reinforcing visions of Virginia provided a framework for undertaking the improvement of urban spaces. In Henrico, reports described “competent and decent houses, the first story of all bricks,” “within this town 3 streets of well framed houses,” and “five fair block houses . . . wherein live the honester sort of people.”¹²⁶ Jamestown, too, had been “reduced into a handsome form, and has in it two fair rows of houses, all of framed timber, two stories and an upper garret, or corn loft high,” and near the town were “some very pleasant and beautiful houses” and “certain other farmhouses.”¹²⁷ Although the precise figures were likely exaggerated in promotional texts, their details of brick houses in Henrico and timber houses in Jamestown suggest some degree of accuracy, at least in the forms of homes constructed. The archaeological record supports these claims, and large structures built from 1611 onward have been uncovered, with “cobblestone foundations,” “brick chimney bases,” and wooden floors (figure 7).¹²⁸ Archaeological evidence from Jamestown also supports large parts of these accounts and confirms that the town had spread across much of the island.¹²⁹

¹²³ Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30.

¹²⁴ For example, a large bakery (Structure 183) was built in 1611. See William M. Kelso, Beverly Straube, and Daniel Schmidt, eds., *2007–2010 Interim Report on the Preservation Virginia Excavations at Jamestown, Virginia* (Jamestown, 2012), 6.

¹²⁵ For destroyed mud-and-stud structure, see Pit 13, Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation, JR2152; Kelso and Straube, *2000–2006 Interim Report*, 17. Row houses in London varied dramatically, and Jamestown properties were not elite dwellings; see Cary Carson et al., “New World, Real World: Improvising English Culture in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” *Journal of Southern History* 74, no. 1 (2008): 31–88, esp. 50–54; Willie Graham et al., “Adaptation and Innovation: Archaeological and Architectural Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2007): 451–522. For context for terraces and their use at Jamestown, see Audrey Horning, “A Verie Fit Place to Erect a Great City”: Comparative Contextual Analysis of Archaeological Jamestown” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995).

¹²⁶ Johnson, *New Life of Virginea*, 14; Hamor, *True Discourse*, 30.

¹²⁷ Hamor, *True Discourse*, 33.

¹²⁸ Structures 172 and 175; see Kelso and Straube, *2000–2006 Interim Report*, 49–51.

¹²⁹ For “fair rows of houses,” see Structures 172 and 175; Kelso and Straube, *2000–2006 Interim Report*, 49–51; Mallios and Straube, *1999 Interim Report*, 32; Cotter, *Archaeological Excavations*, 164. For an overview of Jamestown archaeology, see Barbara Heath et al., *Jamestown Archaeological Assessment* (Washington, DC, 2001).



Figure 6—After 1610, the size of vessels for eating and cooking increased as these activities became more communal. In this image, two small Surrey-Hampshire Border ware vessels on the left; two large (pipkin and dish) objects of the same ware on the right). Courtesy Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation/Preservation Virginia.

In addition to housing, colonists constructed public buildings. These reportedly included “a hospital with fourscore lodgings (and beds already sent to furnish them)” in Henrico.¹³⁰ In Jamestown, archaeological research has revealed an extensive storehouse built and probably expanded at least once during this period to meet the needs of the growing plantation.¹³¹ To provide room for expansion, colonists took down the east wall of the wooden fort and built new buildings, including a large church, across its former path.¹³² The town was also likely built around an extensive marketplace, designed to facilitate intra-plantation trade and mercantile enterprises.¹³³ West’s quickly constructed wood-lined well was supplemented with or supplanted by a new brick-lined well to supply the growing population.¹³⁴

Industrial sites such as limekilns and brick kilns built in and around Jamestown enabled these urban developments, suggesting that at least in part the Virginia

¹³⁰ Johnson, *New Life of Virginia*, 14. See also Hamor, *True Discourse*, 28–33.

¹³¹ Structures 179, 185, and 187: Kelso and Straube, *2000–2006 Interim Report*, 71; Kelso, Straube, and Schmidt, *2007–2010 Interim Report*, 5–6.

¹³² Cotter, *Archaeological Excavations*, 222.

¹³³ Kelso, Straube, and Schmidt, *2007–2010 Interim Report*, 51.

¹³⁴ For well 170, see Kelso and Straube, *2000–2006 Interim Report*, 71–76.



Figure 7—Jamestown row houses and governor’s house. Courtesy Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation/Preservation Virginia.

Company was successful in attracting artisans and other workers who contributed to a viable, self-sustaining colony.¹³⁵ Although the plantation brought in material from overseas, including stone from England and the Caribbean and quantities of lead and iron, many of its needs were met locally.¹³⁶ A number of limekilns, at least one dating from this period, reveal the sophistication of activities undertaken—manufacturing lime “was a delicate operation, requiring experience and care that the charge was not ruined by uneven heating.”¹³⁷ Other structures reveal extensive brick and tile manufacturing on the island.¹³⁸ Workers were also sent to construct waterworks in the James River.¹³⁹ The scale of industrial activities around Jamestown suggests they were expected to provide useful commodities for across the colony. These industries also generated the conditions necessary for long-term profits in the colony, with town building and local industry important for generating higher rents from the land available.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Building techniques were adapted to local climatic circumstances; see Hayden Bassett, “Dwelling in Space through Knowledge of Place: Building and Epistemological Understanding of the Seventeenth-Century British Atlantic,” *Historical Archaeology* 49, no. 2 (2015): 93–114.

¹³⁶ Heath et al., *Jamestown Archaeological Assessment*, 81–87.

¹³⁷ Structures 46, 47, and 88; see Cotter, *Archaeological Excavations*, 88–91.

¹³⁸ For example, see tiles and bricks 2160-JR, 5191-JR and JR3895b (Jamestown Discovery Foundation). For brick kilns (structures 102 and 127), see Cotter, *Archaeological Excavations*, 96, 227; Heath et al., *Jamestown Archaeological Assessment*, 77.

¹³⁹ List of Tradesmen, KHLIC, SA/ZB/2/67, fol. 92.

¹⁴⁰ This practice mirrors that of planters in Ireland; see Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580–1650* (Oxford, 2001), 128–53.



Figure 8—Material culture in Virginia reflected the global trading interests of its merchant leaders. From left to right: top, Portuguese dish, Spanish mercury jar; center, Ligurian costrel, Chinese bowl, Turkish dish; bottom, Augsburg cloth seals and Bavarian buttons, Muscovy lantern glass, beads from Venice and India. Courtesy Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation/Preservation Virginia.

Industries for supplies other than building materials also developed in Jamestown during this period. Some catered to the local population, such as production of clay tobacco pipes, manufacture of pottery, dressing flax, and making soap ash. The products were supplemented by the import of materials from across the world for consumption by the plantation's growing population (figure 8).¹⁴¹ Other industries developed in the colony with an export market in mind.¹⁴² As noted above, the company took an experimental approach to exports, but only sassafras, furs, and clapboards retained their place as key exports. Some commodities, such as fur, were prepared in Virginia before export, boosting local productivity.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Surviving port books lend credence to Virginia Company reports that multiple ships traveled each year. See Port Book, Exeter and Dartmouth, 29 March 1613, TNA, E190/941/7; Port Book, Southampton, 17 June 1616, TNA, E190/820/8; Port Book, London, 26 February, 2 October 1617, TNA, E190/20/1; Port Book, Southampton, August 1619, TNA, E190/821/2. Sassafras, as was tobacco, was restricted to the company's Magazine; see Kingsbury, *Records of the Virginia Company*, 2:52.

¹⁴² Shards from Wells 20 and 21 indicate pipe and pottery production; see Cotter, *Archaeological Excavations*, 157–58. For flax and linen, see Johnson, *New Life of Virginia*, 14. For soap ash, see Strachey's *Travaille*, BL, Sloane MS 1622.

¹⁴³ Forty tenterhooks uncovered in Jamestown indicate that furs were stretched and treated prior to shipping; see Mallios and Straube, *1999 Interim Report*, 42. Furs were one of the earliest reported imports from Virginia, with 220 arriving in England in 1610: see Port Book, Southampton, 23 November 1610, TNA, E190/819/10, p. 3.

Efforts were also made to cultivate goods not native to the region, including hemp, flax, and silkworms.¹⁴⁴ As early as 1610, experimental wine production was attempted, reportedly “twenty gallons at a time, leading colonist William Strachey to wonder “unto what perfection might not be brought by the art and industry of many skilled vigneron, being this naturally good?”¹⁴⁵ By 1614, settlers were reported to have “replanted [grapes] in a vineyard adjoining Henrico, the quantity of three or four acres.”¹⁴⁶ It is possible that the pursuit of Virginian wine faltered after the French Company improved access to the European market in 1612, or that the East India Company’s increasing interest in Persian silk in the 1610s stifled the colony’s efforts to produce silk.¹⁴⁷ More likely, these efforts were laid aside after the successful cultivation of tobacco, a valuable and more competitive cash crop.

As investors had hoped and the Virginia Company promised, Virginia proved a source of numerous materials required for shipbuilding. Returns were almost immediate, and news that “there are pines infinite, especially by the sea coast” led to repeated assurances that the colony would lessen England’s dependency on Muscovy and Polonia.¹⁴⁸ As early as 1610, a three-hundred-ton ship was “fitted and prepared with scupper holes to take in masts” and found the colony so well stocked that it was only able to take on half the available stores.¹⁴⁹ The following year, two ships reached “London from Virginia laden with masts for ships and other heavy commodities.”¹⁵⁰ The use of specially prepared vessels suggests that merchants had considerable confidence in the nascent industry. Their success was timely; when merchant John More wrote to William Trumbull about concerns regarding deforestation in England, he noted in the same letter that “our colonies in Ireland and Virginia do now begin to promise good success.”¹⁵¹ Two years later, Don Diego de Molina, a Spanish prisoner in Virginia, also noted the colony’s capacity in this area, commenting, “There is much oak timber and facilities for making ships.”¹⁵² In 1616, John Chamberlain reported that clapboards were being exported from Virginia to England, although he was dismissive of the value that these goods might fetch.¹⁵³ At the very least, these activities demonstrate the concerted efforts of colonists exploit the possibilities of Virginian timber, and even during this early period, it was not an insignificant export.

Importantly, along with being a potentially profitable export, timber stores contributed to local shipbuilding, and so skilled shipbuilders were sought as settlers.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁴ Rolfe, *True Relation*, 35–36.

¹⁴⁵ Strachey’s *Travaile*, BL, Sloane MS 1622.

¹⁴⁶ Hamor, *True Discourse*, 22.

¹⁴⁷ These were, after all, popular investments of Virginia Company members. For Persian silk, see Francis Cottington to William Trumbull, 10 January 1611, Berkshire Record Office, Trumbull MS, Alphabetical Correspondence, vol. 11, p. 29.

¹⁴⁸ Strachey’s *Travaile*, BL, Sloane MS, 1622.

¹⁴⁹ Strachey’s *Travaile*, BL, Sloane MS, 1622.

¹⁵⁰ Arthur Aynscombe to William Trumbull, 11 November 1611, Berkshire Record Office, Trumbull MS, Miscellaneous Correspondence, vol. 3, p. 174.

¹⁵¹ John More to William Trumbull, 18 January 1611, Berkshire Record Office Trumbull MS, Alphabetical Correspondence, vol. 32, p. 8.

¹⁵² Don Diego de Molina to [Don Alonzo de Velasco], in Tyler, *Narratives*, 218–24, at 222.

¹⁵³ John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, 22 June 1616, TNA, SP 14/87, fol. 134.

¹⁵⁴ List of Tradesmen, KHLC, SA/ZB/2/67, fol. 92.

Officers were ordered to ensure “the diligent employing of our shipwrights, to whom we give great wages . . . as also of the sailors and watermen.”¹⁵⁵ The Virginia Company envisioned a plantation with strong maritime roots—as a fishery, a port, and a dockyard. These developments aligned with mercantile interests elsewhere, including the East India Company’s plan to settle a town in Ireland for ironworking and shipbuilding.¹⁵⁶ Ships constructed in Virginia were likely constructed at Cape Comfort at facilities manned by skilled carpenters.¹⁵⁷ Here, in 1614, Argall “set my men to the felling of timber, for the building of a frigate, which I left half-finished in the hands of the carpenters,” returning three weeks later to collect his finished ship and “to build a fishing boat.”¹⁵⁸ In 1615, settlers traveled to Virginia specifically “to build ships there, having materials great store there for the purpose and for that business intend to send and employ some 200 men”; it was predicted that five ships would be built in six months.¹⁵⁹ Archaeological evidence suggests that by 1618 wharfs were being developed for a deep-water channel near Jamestown, and by 1619 merchants were shipping large quantities of cordage to the colony, either for repairing or building ships locally.¹⁶⁰

Locally built ships were important for fishing, and the company was aware of that industry’s potential, sending skilled fishermen and essential tools (figure 9).¹⁶¹ One town, called Dales Gift, was built specifically for fishing and salting industries.¹⁶² Argall’s journal noted opportunities for fishing in local rivers and the Atlantic, and he sent senior officers on separate voyages, one officer in his main ship “fitted for an intended fishing voyage,” another “employed in the frigate, for getting of fish at Cape Charles,” and a third in the newly built fishing boat.¹⁶³ In 1615, the Virginia Company sent five ships on a fishing expedition to support the colony.¹⁶⁴ The colony also had some potential for whaling, and small volumes of “Trayne [whale] oil” were exported to England from the plantation.¹⁶⁵ These industries were vital for supplying the new colony, and the company was well aware of their global value.

¹⁵⁵ Virginia Company to Thomas West, March 1611, Pepys Library, FP 30.

¹⁵⁶ The East India Company spent £7,000 in Dundaniel, housing three hundred settlers who had built two large ships by 1613; see Letter to the Lord Chichester, 30 June 1613, TNA, PC/2/27, fol. 34; C. W. Russell and John P. Prendergast, eds., *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland, of the Reign of James I, 1603–1625*, vol. 4 (London, 1877), 369. See also Paddy O’Sullivan, “The English East India Company at Dundaniel,” *Bandon Historical Journal*, no. 4 (1988): 3–14.

¹⁵⁷ Don Diego de Molina to [Don Alonzo de Velasco], in Tyler, *Narratives*, 218–24.

¹⁵⁸ Samuel Argall to Nicholas Hawes, June 1613, Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 1765.

¹⁵⁹ John Woodall to William Trumbull, 6 July 1615, Berkshire Record Office, Trumbull MS, Miscellaneous Correspondence, vol. 7, p. 49.

¹⁶⁰ Site 935; see Blanton, Kandle, and Downing, *Archaeological Survey*, 167–69. This site is undergoing further examination by Hayden Bassett. For cordage, see Piotr Bojakowski and Katie Bojakowski, “The Warwick: Results of the Survey of an Early 17th-Century Virginia Company Ship,” *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 45, no. 1 (2011): 41–53, at 42.

¹⁶¹ West, *Relation of the Right Honourable the Lord De-La-Warre*, B3. Numerous fishhooks recovered in Jamestown attest to this supply.

¹⁶² Rolfe, *True Relation*, 39.

¹⁶³ Samuel Argall to Nicholas Hawes, June 1613, Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 1765.

¹⁶⁴ John Woodall to William Trumbull, 6 July 1615, Berkshire Record Office, Trumbull MS, Miscellaneous Correspondence, vol. 7, p. 49.

¹⁶⁵ Port Book, Exeter and Dartmouth, 9 October 1612, TNA, E190/941/4, p. 46.



Figure 9—Large numbers of North Devon earthenware salted fish pots attest to the importance of fishing for the Virginia Colony. Courtesy Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation/Preservation Virginia.

In addition to seeking to extract value from Virginia's coasts, colonists also maintained hope to extract mineral wealth from the land. In 1610, West approved one expedition for mines but denied William Faldoe permission to establish a silver mine six miles inland, citing difficulties of "raising forts and planting so far into the country."¹⁶⁶ News of potential mining locations was well received in England, such as when officers "gathered many scattered pieces of crystal" or when locals promised "to bring them where they shall meet with gold mines," but the reports never led to concerted efforts.¹⁶⁷ Even when metals were successfully identified, such as "a goodly iron mine" that Dale identified, which had previously produced fourteen tons "so good, as the East India merchants bought It off the Virginian Company," they remained underdeveloped.¹⁶⁸ Despite numerous suggestions for mines further inland, the Virginia Company never made them a priority. Considering

¹⁶⁶ George Yeardley to Sir Henry Peyton, 18 November 1610, Bodleian Library, English History MS C4, p. 3. See also Strachey's *Travaile*, BL, Sloane MS 1622.

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Dale to Earl of Salisbury, 17 August 1611, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 26; Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 1765.

¹⁶⁸ Strachey's *Travaile*, BL, Sloane MS 1622. See also Rich, *Lost Flock*, B2. On why iron mining was not developed during this period, see Keith Plumers, "Atlantic Iron: Wood Scarcity and the Political Economy of Early English Expansion," *William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2016): 389–426. The East India Company purchased the iron for £4 a ton, a third of the standard price for iron exported to Asia; see Court of Committees of the East India Company, BL, IOR/B/2, fol. 37.

the entanglements between the company and the East India Company and other commercial efforts, this underdevelopment might reflect competing visions about where and how English merchants could be supplied with iron. The East India Company had, after all, recently invested considerable sums in developing its own ironworks at Dundaniel in Ireland and its own dockyard at Blackwall in England.¹⁶⁹ Despite purchasing iron from Virginia during this period, it may not have wanted to encourage competing facilities across the Atlantic, suggesting that this aspect of Virginia's industrial development may have been stymied by the very networks that provided investment, management expertise, and governing oversight.

Instead, tobacco came to dominate as an exportable, high-volume export.¹⁷⁰ A strain of tobacco from the Caribbean planted in Virginia by John Rolfe in 1613 grew well, and efforts to produce large quantities continued apace.¹⁷¹ Poor knowledge of production methods led to early difficulties, but experimentation and adaptation of Algonquian methods soon brought improvement.¹⁷² By 1615, the company had established a regulated entity within the corporation known as the Magazine to oversee the trade. Here goods from England were exchanged for tobacco "at such prices that the adventurers may be no losers."¹⁷³ Tobacco cultivation made trade with the colony more immediately viable and land in the plantation more valuable.

Despite early losses, by 1616 a self-sufficient colony that straddled the James River was emerging. It had dependable stocks of food, several established nucleated settlements, and numerous local industries; it was a market for merchants' goods and was starting to produce a significant cash crop. From the sixty men whom West first met leaving Jamestown, the population had swelled to between 350 and 400.¹⁷⁴ These were necessary foundations for meeting investors' expectations that the colony could serve as a market for goods, a site for manufacture, and a source of both long-term rental income and raw materials. On his return to England, Rolfe declared, "no country in Christendom is so small a circuit, so well stored."¹⁷⁵ Company leaders must have been delighted; their plantation was growing, industries were blooming, and money was starting to flow.

¹⁶⁹ Horning, *Ireland in the Virginian Sea*, 278. William Pettigrew and Edmond Smith, "Corporate Management, Labor Relations, and Community Building at the East India Company's Blackwall Dockyard, 1600–57," *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 1 (2019): 133–56.

¹⁷⁰ This focus was contested by some investors, and a desire for a more diverse economic base in Virginia was a major objective of Edwin Sandys and the new government of the colony after 1619. See Craven, *Dissolution*, 94, 96–98, 100–102.

¹⁷¹ For tobacco's rise to prominence, see Lorena S. Walsh, *Motives of Honour, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake* (Williamsburg, 2010).

¹⁷² Hamor, *True Discourse*, 34–35. Tobacco cultivation depended on imported farming implements; see Chris Evans, "The Plantation Hoe: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Commodity, 1650–1850," *William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2012): 71–100.

¹⁷³ Rolfe, *True Relation*, 37–38.

¹⁷⁴ Mortality rates remained very high despite efforts to ensure supplies of clean water and food. There is little to suggest that Virginia Company leaders saw these rates as unsustainable or even particularly troubling, perhaps because of high mortality in England (especially in London during plagues), comparable mortality rates on East India Company voyages, awareness of "armies lost" during Spanish colonization, or religious views.

¹⁷⁵ Rolfe, *True Relation*, 33–34.

PROFITING FROM THE VIRGINIA PLANTATION

By 1616, the Virginia plantation had achieved many of its initial aims. Writing to Ralph Winwood on his return to London that year, Dale recounted “the hardest task that ever I undertook” and celebrated leaving “the colony in great prosperity and peace contrary to many men’s expectations.”¹⁷⁶ Merchants in London praised him widely in print and some showed their appreciation by appointing him admiral of a large fleet sent to the East Indies.¹⁷⁷ The plantation had not only survived, which had been doubtful only six years before, but it had prospered; it was ambitiously predicted to become “one of the goodliest and richest kingdoms of the world.”¹⁷⁸

Such a dramatic turnaround in fortunes forced critics to ask, “How is it possible Virginia can now be so good? So fertile a country? So plentifully stored with food and other commodities? Is it not the same still it was, when men pined with famine?”¹⁷⁹ Success was laid at the feet of the Virginia Company’s leadership and its officers in America—but so was criticism that it had not achieved enough.¹⁸⁰ Some investors were unhappy, frustrated that “all I can learn of it is that the country is good to live in” and complaining “there is no present profit to be expected.”¹⁸¹ After 1616, there were growing differences between investors who accepted that the budding plantation was meeting expectations and those who demanded greater returns. The very success of the colony drove them to question ongoing policy: if it was now well furnished and supplied, why not send more settlers, take more land, and proselytize aggressively?

However, the Virginia Company’s leadership remained dedicated to maintaining the sought-after peace with Powhatan, and the visit of “the most remarkable person . . . Pocahontas (daughter to Powhatan a king or calique of that country)” was widely celebrated in England.¹⁸² Peace meant that the colony was not only more secure but its residents now inhabited six locations obtained—so it was claimed—“not so much by conquest” but purchased with a “just and lawful title.”¹⁸³ Earlier claims that Powhatan “has granted freedom of trade and commerce to our English people” alongside privileges to “plant, fortify and possess” territory in America suddenly seemed more legitimate.¹⁸⁴ Taking advantage, the company declared, “We are now by the natives liking and consent, in actual possession of a

¹⁷⁶ Thomas Dale to Ralph Winwood, 3 June 1616, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 34.

¹⁷⁷ Here he continued to impose strict discipline. See Court of Committees of the East India Company, BL, IOR/B/6, fols. 30, 77, 156; A Court Held Aboard the Moon, 21 May 1618, BL, IOR/E/3/7, fols. 22–23. Another officer, Christopher Newport, was also rewarded with a position; see Court of Committees of the East India Company, BL, IOR/B/5, fol. 6.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Dale to Ralph Winwood, 3 June 1616, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 34.

¹⁷⁹ Rolfe, *True Relation*, 33.

¹⁸⁰ Virginia was presented as a model for colonization elsewhere, including in Bermuda and Guiana. See Daniel Tucker to Nathaniel Rich, 14 July 1616, in Ives, *The Rich Papers*, 7–8; regarding Guiana, see Grant for Guiana, August 1613, TNA, SO 3/5, fols. 6–8.

¹⁸¹ John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, 22 June 1616, TNA, SP 14/87, fol. 134.

¹⁸² John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, 22 June 1616, TNA, SP 14/87, fol. 134. For Matoaka’s visit to England, see Helen C. Rountree, *Pocahontas, Powhatan, Opechancanough: Three Indian Lives Changed by Jamestown* (Charlottesville, 2005).

¹⁸³ Rolfe, *True Relation*, 39.

¹⁸⁴ *Considering there is No Public Action*.

great part of the country,” and the rest was free to be planted once trees were cleared and land surveyed.¹⁸⁵ Consequently, the company began to organize a dividend at the rate of fifty acres per share, covering lands alongside both banks of the James River and around the settled towns.¹⁸⁶ Further investment was required to defray the cost of surveyors sent to Virginia with instructions to return to England with “a perfect map and description of the said lands and ground divided, that every man may see and know in what condition and where his land lies.”¹⁸⁷

Dividends were allotted to allow any adventurer receiving land to “dispose thereof at his pleasure, either by going himself in person to possess it, or by sending families to manure it for yearly rent, or for half the clear profits as many others do.”¹⁸⁸ Much as was the case for livery companies in Ireland, the option to rent property to a third party was attractive, and if rents in Virginia were close to those in England, investors would see positive returns very quickly.¹⁸⁹ Others chose to manage their lands directly. Argall, now the owner of a large tract of land and governor of the colony, had “undertaken to transport and carry thither a certain number of men” with “their wives, their children and their families” to work on his property. Their transport from England was covered in part by “the charge of others his friends that join with him in that voyage”—suggesting some degree of a secondary investment market for Virginian property. Argall’s approach was presented as an ideal example of how the ongoing project “may be brought to good perfection, by the division and setting out of lands to every particular person, the settling of trade, and return of commodities.”¹⁹⁰ Some adventurers certainly took this advice, and later in 1617, one landowner, Lord Zouch, paid the passage for seven men to oversee his lands, in return for a third of all profits as rent.¹⁹¹ Travel to and from the colony was no longer restricted, and opportunities for private investment grew.¹⁹²

The company continued to develop its own properties, sending up to 160 settlers in 1618 and planning another fleet the following summer.¹⁹³ It also ensured that time was spent time repairing and improving facilities—including the construction of a new church and school.¹⁹⁴ Other urbanization projects included improvements at the governor’s residence: the addition of bay windows, elaborate plaster décor, and locally made tile floors.¹⁹⁵ Returning to Virginia in 1617, Rolfe reported the “good estate of the colony” and informed Edwin Sandys that the plantation had “never enjoy[ed] a firmer peace, nor more plenty.”¹⁹⁶ Similarly positive news was

¹⁸⁵ Virginia Company, *Brief Declaration*, 5.

¹⁸⁶ Virginia Company, 5, 7.

¹⁸⁷ Virginia Company, 6–7. Investors were offered an addition fifty acres if they paid a further £12 10s.

¹⁸⁸ Virginia Company, 7.

¹⁸⁹ Costs of settlement versus potential tobacco yields make estimated rental value difficult. Average rents in England were 2s. per acre, suggesting fifty-acre landholdings (for a £12 10s. share) were worth up to £5 annually; see Clark, “Land Rental Values,” 27.

¹⁹⁰ Virginia Company, *By His Majesties Councill for Virginia* (London, 1617).

¹⁹¹ Lord Zouch’s Adventure to Virginia, 27 December 1617, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 36.

¹⁹² Virginia Company, *By His Majesties Councill*.

¹⁹³ John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, 31 January 1618, TNA, SP 14/95, fol. 82.

¹⁹⁴ John Rolfe to Edwin Sandys, 8 June 1617, Pepys Library, FP 76; Thomas Smith to George Abbott, 2 March 1617, Pepys Library FP 71.

¹⁹⁵ Kelso, *Jamestown*, 246–48.

¹⁹⁶ John Rolfe to Edwin Sandys, 8 June 1617, Pepys Library, FP 76.

distributed across England, and descriptions of how settlers “sow and reap their corn,” that “their kine multiply already to some hundreds, their swine to many thousands [and] their goats and poultry in great numbers” helped attract new settlers.¹⁹⁷ “There wants nothing for settling of that Christian plantation,” the company declared, “but more hands to gather and return those commodities which may bring profit to the adventurers.”¹⁹⁸ The population continued to rise rapidly and by the end of 1618 had reached around 1,200—a threefold increase in only three years to a size equivalent to that of many small English towns.¹⁹⁹ As the population and settlements grew, the value of land in the colony grew as well.

Trade to and from the colony remained largely in the hands of the company’s members. After an agreement made “as a special favour to that Company in regard of their charge and industry in the settling of that plantation,” goods transported to England were allowed “for some further time to be customs free.”²⁰⁰ Ships continued to carry locally produced commodities, including “exceedingly good tobacco, sassafras, pitch, pot ashes, sturgeon and caviar and other such like commodities” including timber.²⁰¹ Tobacco, of course, had become the most important single crop, and exports to England rose rapidly: 2,500 pounds in 1616; 18,839 in 1617; and 49,518 in 1618.²⁰² In 1618, the Virginia Company sold £5,250 worth of tobacco in England.²⁰³ Shipments were carefully scheduled to ensure the cargo would reach England before the East India Company fleets’ autumn departure, suggesting that Virginian tobacco was already making an impact in global markets.²⁰⁴

In return for tobacco and other commodities, the Virginia Company transported numerous goods to Virginia. These included products from across Europe, the Mediterranean, and Asia, and merchants used their connections elsewhere to supply the colony with goods suitable for its growing urban population. In addition to simple English and northern European wares, the archaeological record suggests settlers were attracted to decorative items that demonstrated social value. Two voyages from England to Virginia by the English ship the *George* in 1617 reveal a wide range of goods. A first voyage transported sixteen small pigs of lead and nine hundred rolls of canvas, items primarily for practical use, but the second voyage delivered a greater variety of items.²⁰⁵ These included knives, swords, flintlock firearms, two-hundred-weight of sugar, a ton of lead, and a ton of iron—goods necessary for both day-to-day tasks of colonists and to supply domestic industries now found across the Virginia plantation. It also carried cambrics, 295 rolls of Holland cloth, 750 linen cloths from Brittany, 120 yards of diaper napkins, 360 yards of Silesian diaper tabling, 340 good cottons, 50 coarse Irish rugs, 300 yards of East Country ticking, 120

¹⁹⁷ Virginia Company, *Brief Declaration*, 4.

¹⁹⁸ Virginia Company, *By His Majesties Councill*.

¹⁹⁹ Virginia Company, *A Note of the Shipping, Men, and Provisions, Sent to Virginia* (London, 1620), 3.

²⁰⁰ Meeting at Whitehall, 4 December 1617, TNA, PC 2/29, fol. 201.

²⁰¹ Thomas Dale to Ralph Winwood, 3 June 1616, TNA, CO 1/1, fol. 34. See also John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, 22 June 1616, TNA, SP 14/87, fol. 134.

²⁰² Estimates are from “Lord Sackville’s Papers Respecting Virginia, 1613–1631,” *American Historical Review* 27, no. 3 (1922): 493–538, at 526.

²⁰³ The Virginia Company transported at least 20,000 pounds in 1618, valued at £5,250: see Thomas J. Wetenbaker, *The Planters of Colonial Virginia* (Princeton, 1922), 64.

²⁰⁴ Kingsbury, *Records*, 3:78–79.

²⁰⁵ Port Book, London, 26 February 1617, TNA, E190/21/2, p. 43.

felt hats, 36 Monmouth caps, 604 pairs of children's stockings, 10 Genoese fustians, 20 Osnabruck fustians, 9.5 English fustians, and 17 "pieces of striped stuff."²⁰⁶ Trade between England and Virginia was successful enough that the merchant charged with running it in Jamestown, "at first a very poor man . . . through his employment in the said Magazine, was become exceedingly rich."²⁰⁷

The colony was yet another market for Virginia Company merchants who were already looking across the globe for prospects to export English products or obtain valuable commodities. It also supported English trade in other ways, as a source of shipping materials and for goods that could be re-exported across the globe. Together, trade, local industry, food production, and the cultivation of tobacco contributed not only to the viability of the Virginia colony as a self-sustaining enterprise but increasingly also as one where land was increasingly valuable. Land in Virginia had been presented as an important investment opportunity, especially for merchants looking to use profits from activities in Spain, the Levant, and East Indies to diversify portfolios and even elevate their social position. It is not surprising, then, that these individuals whose livelihood depended on burgeoning trade and connectivity across the world developed a strategy for the colony that drew on this experience while also providing them with opportunities for new types of long-term returns—in industry and in land. In Virginia, they saw the possibilities of building a colony that would contribute to their connected interests on numerous levels. Despite their brief tenure governing the colony, they created a plantation that was profitable, self-sufficient, and intricately tied into wider networks of trade and empire.

²⁰⁶ Port Book, London, 2 October 1617, TNA, E190/21/2, p. 44.

²⁰⁷ According to complaints by the Virginia Company's new leadership. See Kingsbury, *Records*, 2:219.