

# Powhatan Indian Women: The People Captain John Smith Barely Saw

---

Helen C. Rountree, *Old Dominion University*

**Abstract.** Most of the eyewitness accounts about Powhatan Indians concern the men's world. This essay attempts to compensate for the imbalance by adding the evidence available from ethnographic analogy from other Woodland Indian cultures, reconstructive ethnobotany in the Chesapeake region, and living history as practiced at the Jamestown Settlement Museum's Indian Village. The women emerge as tough, energetic, sociable people who scheduled their work carefully and did much of it independently from the men. The essay describes women's activities on a "typical" day in early May 1607 in a real village that has been excavated archaeologically at the mouth of the Chickahominy River.

In my writings on the Powhatan Indians up to now, I have played it fairly safe and close to the documents, which regrettably has meant writing mainly about the men's world. In this essay I want to start trying to bring the women of A.D. 1607 to life, which means going out onto limbs, occasionally onto twigs. I will, at least, distinguish between what we can safely know and what must be inferred, and I will give evidence for that knowledge or inference as I go.

The eyewitness accounts of the Powhatan Indians of 1607 were all written by people who had several severe disabilities as ethnographers. They were males who found themselves describing a society in which men and women were probably not accustomed to talking with each other freely. I will elaborate on the reticence issue at the end of the essay, for it would have been an outcome of several things I must establish first. But for now, we must face the likelihood that even a deeply curious Englishman like William Strachey would not have elicited detailed responses from the few Powhatan women he could have interviewed. In addition, the early writers

were Elizabethan Englishmen, so they saw Powhatan lifeways through a very cloudy lens. Aside from their own strongly patriarchal cultural background, which colored their views of all women, including Powhatan ones, they were in the New World to establish a colony for their own people, at the expense of the "wild" native people if necessary. From the very beginning of Jamestown, the invaders were braced for Indian resistance and prepared (they hoped!) to take military action if that resistance materialized. John Smith, Strachey, and Henry Spelman observed the natives for purposes of surveillance, not "pure" knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The result in the early accounts of the Powhatan Indians is therefore an almost myopic emphasis on men's activities: war, politics, and religion. It was, after all, those activities in concert that could seriously threaten the English enterprise. Women mattered only insofar as they raised corn, a commodity the colonists had to purchase whenever their own supplies were inadequate.

Thus if we want to reconstruct more fully what Powhatan women's lives were like, we must go far beyond milking the limited historical sources for all they are worth. In this essay I will use three additional kinds of information on which to base inferences. All three may make document-clinging historians uncomfortable, but that is too bad. I am a cultural anthropologist, and it is time I returned to my spreading roots.

First, I will use ethnographic analogy, an anthropological technique based on the premise that two or more cultures that have some basic similarities, especially ecological and economic ones, may have other similarities in related areas of life, such as the status of women compared to men. This technique is a valid basis for making inferences if it is used carefully; I will use other Eastern Woodland farming cultures and cite accounts of them dated as closely as possible to first contact with Europeans, keeping in mind that those accounts often show considerable myopia of their own.

Second, since Smith and Strachey do say something, however minimal, about the wild plants that Powhatan women used, I have been doing for several years now what I call "reconstructive ethnobotany" for the Powhatans: compiling a list of the edible, utilitarian, and medicinal plants in eastern Virginia that are both native and wild and that the Powhatans either were recorded as using or *could have used*. Such a list sheds light not only on possible nutritional matters but also on people's seasonal movements within their territories. The plants grow in certain habitats, most of which are away from the Indian town sites, and are useful at certain seasons, so women gathering them would have had to visit those habitats at the relevant times.<sup>2</sup> Before I began the list, I had the usual Euro-American view of Indian women as stay-at-homes; now I know better.

Third, I have turned to “living history”—and have pushed its local practitioners at Jamestown Settlement to begin expanding the museum-centered way it is usually done—to tell me what some of the “quality of life” was like for Powhatan women. The settlement’s Indian Village staff could tell me in detail about doing hands-on crafts that could be practiced in town, while talking to tourists. But my idea of living history further involves my identifying plants and their locations and then our collecting and preparing them—and noticing which muscles hurt afterward.<sup>3</sup> For instance, digging tuckahoe for bread making was women’s work, since the English writers do not include it in the men’s list of tasks. It can be very hard work in itself, as we have discovered; it also involved travel to and working in marshes at frequent intervals in the late spring and early summer, which in turn required women to have regular access to dugout canoes and strong bodies to paddle them. Before I tried any foraging or canoe paddling, I thought of Indian women as hardworking but not as “fitness nuts.” Now, having tried it—and having heard a physical anthropologist (Donna Boyd, who analyzes skeletal remains from protohistoric and early contact Virginia sites) say that the women’s skeletons she sees are more robust than those of most modern males—and then having reread Smith and Strachey, I know better.

The present essay does not deal with Powhatan women in their “public” appearances, which were the occasions on which English visitors, treated as VIPs, would have seen them. We already know from Smith’s, Strachey’s, and Spelman’s accounts that women could inherit or be assigned chiefly power and that their raising of corn was considered important in the Powhatan world, as it was among other coastal Algonquians.<sup>4</sup> Nor does this essay deal much with how women got married and divorced, for I have described that elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Instead I want to look at women’s daily work to try to get at the texture that underlay and helped explain their other, seemingly contradictory appearances in the English records. Powhatan females were supposedly semiservants doing a “painefull” number of support jobs for their huntin’ and fishin’ husbands, whose apparent “idleness” caused everybody to live “from hand to mouth” much of the year.<sup>6</sup> Yet simultaneously these women had considerable sexual autonomy; they were able to turn down suitors (few English maidens of that time were given such a choice) and to take lovers later on with their husbands’ permission. Hardworking drudges with freedom? As we shall see, the word *drudge* is the part that does not fit.

In the following pages there are four points that I will emphasize about the daily lives of Powhatan females: (a) Women had to schedule their work,

sometimes well ahead, although they did not do it on English clock time; Smith was wrong to think that life at any time of year was opportunistically lived "from hand to mouth." (b) Women worked in groups, most often same-sex ones, sometimes because they had to and at other times because sociability lightens any load.<sup>7</sup> (c) Powhatan women had to be physically strong and energetic to do their work, just as the men did. No Virginia source says so, but the nature of the work, if we try it ourselves, demands toughness. And English writers in other colonies agree: John Lawson says the Carolina Indian women were "of a very hale Constitution"; Roger Williams, writing of the southern New England Algonquians of 1643, mentions "the hardness of their constitution," while David Zeisberger describes the women as "strong" among the Delawares, Miamis, Shawnees, and Munsis of his day.<sup>8</sup> (d) Women's work in the Powhatan world was at least as varied as men's work. True, it did not have the excitement and tremendous though temporary exertions characteristic of warfare and the chase, tempered by periods of resting up and politicking. But continuous and carefully paced as it was, women's work appears to have taken place in a number of different settings each day and to have required a considerable variety of skills. People who do work that they themselves plan and that is socially exclusive, demanding of skill and energy, and interestingly varied are unlikely to be drudges, in their own eyes or in the eyes of knowledgeable others. I submit that that was the case with Powhatan women.

Let us take a Powhatan hamlet through a day, focusing on the women who live there. I will set the scene in a real but unnamed hamlet that has been excavated archaeologically.<sup>9</sup> The community, dated to just before and after the arrival of the English seven miles away at Jamestown, was within the Paspahugh chiefdom, a small political group subject to the paramount chief Powhatan and located on both sides of the mouth of the Chickahominy River.<sup>10</sup> The view I photographed from one end of the hamlet, at the water's edge, spans to the opposite point at the Chickahominy's junction with the James River (Figure 1). Open vistas along the rivers were the kind that the Powhatans, ever alert for enemies, preferred.

The trees in the photograph, except for the pine on the left, are bald cypresses, which grow along the margins of both rivers there and are more rot resistant than any other species. Prime canoe-making materials are right at hand. The map shows that other resource-rich ecological zones are also fairly close by for women to exploit (Figure 2). Besides the river itself, there are extensive freshwater marshes (sources of edible roots and house-building materials) bordering the tributary creeks and considerable expanses of deciduous woodland (sources of nuts and fuel) between the



Figure 1. View of the junction of the James and Chickahominy Rivers, looking west-southwest from archaeological site 44JC308.

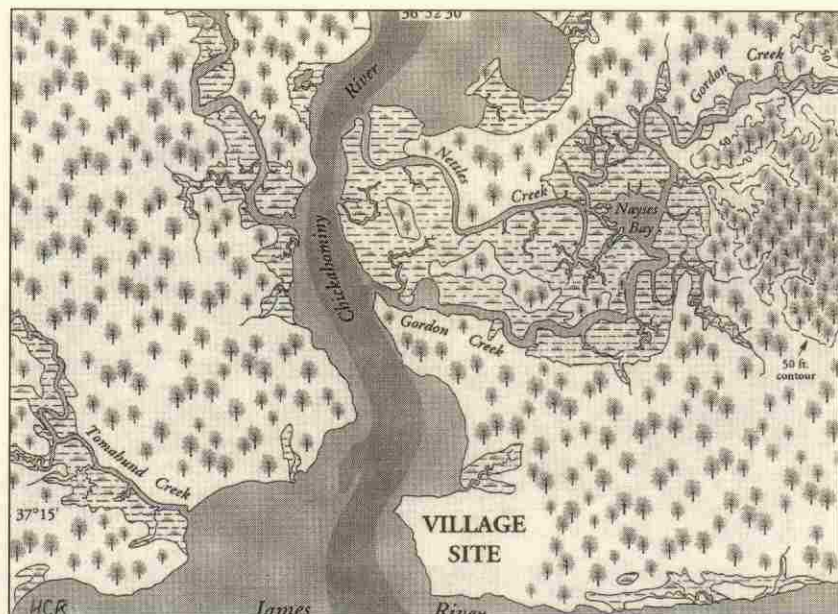


Figure 2. Location of a Paspahugh hamlet (44JC308) among rivers, marshes, and woods.

waterways. Below the fifty-foot contour, the land is gently rolling or, at the village site itself, nearly flat and well suited for horticulture. In fact, the soil at the site contains the largest single patch of Pamunkey loam, the region's best corn-growing soil, to be found along the Chickahominy.<sup>11</sup> This was truly a hamlet that had everything. It also had neighbors: Out of the scope of the map, there were other Paspahugh villages and the chief's town within a few miles up and down the James.<sup>12</sup> The female and male denizens of our hamlet would have been continually meeting their friends and relatives from those other settlements, both in planned visits and in chance encounters as they went about the work that took them away from home.

The drawing is my bird's-eye reconstruction of part of the hamlet, based on the site plan made by the archaeologists (Figure 3). Peering over a tree branch, we are looking at the randomly oriented layout of several reed-mat-covered houses (Strachey says that bark coverings were for rich people), though neither I nor the archaeologists can be sure that all the houses shown existed simultaneously. The hamlet had small groves of trees between the scattered houses, according to Strachey, to protect them in storms and to give the people shade. I have omitted those and have set

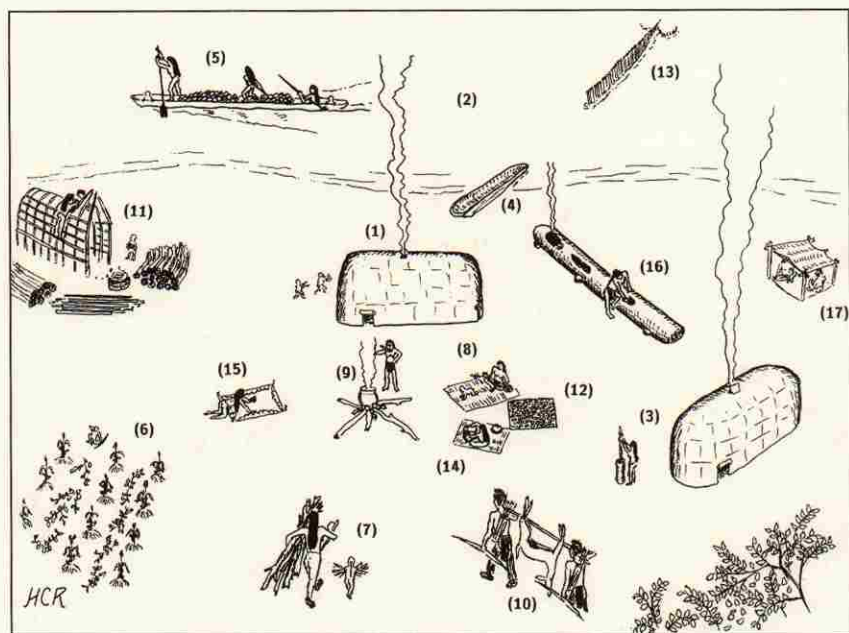


Figure 3. Women's work was varied and often very physical.

our tree well back, partly to include all the kinds of women's work and partly because Powhatan women wore so little (deerskin aprons) that I did not want my drawing to become an anatomy exercise. I also show fewer people in the picture than there would have been in real life, especially in the areas representing house building and firewood gathering, to keep the scene from becoming too cluttered.

We are doing our spying on the first of May 1607. It is an ordinary day. There is no priestly curing ceremony going on, nor are any boys being started on the *huskanaw* (initiation) process. There is no ripe corn as yet, so no thanksgiving celebrations are in the offing. Wowinchopunk, the Paspaheg chief, is not visiting, and the great Powhatan is staying up on the York River, where he belongs. The English ships bringing colonists will not get this far up the James for three more days. (Everybody knows they are coming, of course, and gossip about them is rife.) The shad and herring are finishing their spring runs, so that nets and traps are still bringing in a lot of food. The women are weeding the fields they planted last month and planting second fields now. Last year's supply of corn, beans, and gathered nuts has run out. It is a time both for farming and for heavy foraging

in the women's world—the very time that women's work would be most “painefull.”

People wake up in the early dawn, since (according to George Percy) they will finish their ablutions before the sun rises. The houses in which they have slept (1) are barrel-vaulted affairs whose smoke holes and low doors ensure that the interiors are easily filled with smoke; reconstructions of such houses always smell of wood smoke. On the authority of Strachey we know that fires are always going in the houses, for letting them go out would be bad luck. They also repel insects during the warm months (mosquitoes, that is—the only escape from fleas is to move house) and provide heat in the cold months. Like us, the Powhatans believe in heating sleeping rooms rather than using lots of bedding; what little bedding they do use consists of mats and skins that are rolled up and stored during the day. So during the past night, someone in each household has agreed to feed the fire at intervals. As the Indian Village staff at Jamestown Settlement can attest, a moderate-sized fire can fill an Indian house with a layer of smoke that reaches down to about two feet above the floor. Perhaps that is another reason why the “beds” lining the walls of Powhatan houses are only, according to Strachey's description, sitting distance high (“a foote high and somewhat more”): sleepers do not have to inhale thick smoke all night. The beds are rather narrow, and couples have slept head to foot (“heades and points one by the other”).<sup>13</sup> Such beds allow no privacy unless mat partitions are put up around them.<sup>14</sup> And mats, in single or multiple layers, and also the outer bark walls of chief's houses, are far from sound-proof. If Powhatan women and their husbands procreate on those beds, rather than out in the fields or woods (English sources are silent on the matter), then there can be visual but not sonic privacy for lovemaking. Corroboration comes from Lawson, who indicated in 1709 that among the Carolina Indians, people considered it enough not to be actively watched.<sup>15</sup>

Everybody, even babes in arms, goes to the river to bathe before dawn (2). Cleanliness is the main reason during the warm months; when the water is cold, then hardiness also comes into play. It is not only infants, mentioned by Smith, who need endurance. Children and adults of both sexes spend the daylight hours outdoors, weather permitting, since houses built in the Powhatan fashion are rather dark to try to work in. Moreover, people do active jobs that make nontailored clothing a hindrance (think of trying to dig roots while wearing an “Indian blanket” of deerskins). So everybody makes a virtue of necessity and, wearing few clothes, strives to be “hardy.” Bathing every morning in all weathers helps. After the bath, as the sun rises, people make tobacco offerings and pray to the sun. They have reason to want supernatural help: the day will bring real hazards (see below), and everyone needs a good crop of corn this year.



The next order of business is breakfast, which is informal. Powhatan people eat freely when food is available and they are hungry, except for the boys, whose mothers make them shoot a tossed bit of moss before they can have their breakfast. Not much food is ready yet, though. Whatever stew was left over from supper has been kept simmering, probably on the house's fire that had to be kept going anyway, but it has been raided all night as people woke up feeling peckish.<sup>16</sup> There is no leftover roast meat, for people were careful to eat it all up last night (the alternative would be either spoiled meat or, if it was left over the fire, mummified roasted flesh). So now some of the hamlet's women and girls start pounding dried tuckahoe into flour for bread (3), talking volubly as they work and possibly singing work songs to keep up the pounding rhythm.<sup>17</sup> Others fetch springwater to start the day's stew. Men and boys will go out to get meat at intervals all day long: boys gather mussels, men and boys alike try their luck in hunting, and anyone can dip into the fish trap if the tide is right (see below). The first things to come in will probably be quickly roasted and eaten along with the newly baked bread; later contributions will go into the family stewpots.

With breakfast goes a final discussion of the day's work, most of the plans having been made the previous evening.<sup>18</sup> Work parties need to be agreed on for various of the women's jobs, the number of women in the hamlet being limited, and also for any clearing of new fields by men. The work of both sexes today will also involve traveling in canoes (4); the women are as dextrous and almost as strong in handling them as the men.<sup>19</sup> So allocation must be made of the available dugouts.

I cannot reconstruct the specific composition of the work parties among the hamlet's women, beyond saying that it was surely kin-based.<sup>20</sup> The women living in the hamlet would have been connected through the men, in patrilocal Powhatan society, and they would have included men's mothers, unmarried sisters, and wives and cowives (young wives married for affection and older wives married by contract for their experience).<sup>21</sup> The women working together might be members of an extended family, or they might cooperate because of sameness of age or personal congeniality. There is nothing at all to tell us. But work together they did: Powhatan women were probably almost never alone. Group effort lightened the load in land-based work. On the water it was a necessity, for a dugout canoe, even a small one, is heavy and cumbersome to maneuver. To make any speed at all in one requires at least two people paddling or poling, while keeping it on course is best done with yet another person using a paddle as a rudder astern (5). Thus we shall see several parties of women working actively away from the hamlet on this day and returning to do more work sociably back in town. Any one woman would have engaged in all the

kinds of work over a period of several days, there being no occupational specialization in Powhatan society.

Work Party No. 1 goes out to the fields (6), probably in the morning before the sun gets too hot; May in eastern Virginia is hot but not baking hot. The field in the drawing is very near the houses, which is the women's preference; other fields are farther away and require a trudge. The women are planting one field and weeding another that was planted a month ago; yet another field will be planted in a month's time. The planting process probably involves some sort of "medicine" or prayer to ensure a good crop, though the English accounts say nothing whatever about this. It will not work this year: The summer of 1607 will be a dry one.<sup>22</sup>

The planting tools the women use, crooked sticks scraped smooth on both sides, are simple and lightweight, but the work involves a lot of bending over and reaching. It is a good thing that each field is less than an acre, even with multiple women doing the work.<sup>23</sup> Some women carry babies to the fields in their cradleboards, which can be conveniently hung from a tree nearby.<sup>24</sup> Powhatan women, like other Woodland Indian women, probably nurse their babies for well over a year after birth, so it would make sense to keep baby and food source together.<sup>25</sup> Each family (or possibly extended family) has several fields of varying age (one to three years) to care for, each with a different spring planting time; later, when all of the fields are under cultivation, some of the men may help their busy wives.<sup>26</sup> They will also work with their women to produce a field of corn for the chief, as well as start the clearing process on a new field to replace a three-year-old field that is nearly exhausted.<sup>27</sup> As the years go by and fields are cleared, cultivated, and allowed to go back to woods, the areas under cultivation move up and down the riverside on the fairly level ground. So do the houses, which are so biodegradable that it is simpler to build a new one "closer to work" than to resheathe an old one completely in a location now distant from the current fields.

When the women finish their weeding, they leave a boy or two behind to act as a scarecrow (a "scarecrow hut" is shown in a John White painting from Carolina, and Williams wrote about children sitting in "little watch-houses" to scare off birds).<sup>28</sup> Powhatan boys, young as they are, are already under pressure to become marksmen and contribute to the stewpot, so logically they will not only scare off birds but also sit quietly and allow corn-eating animals like raccoons, opossums, and even deer to enter the field and get close enough to shoot.

Corn is food that confers high status on its owners. Any unravaged corn that the fields produce will be harvested and processed by the women; also allocated for cooking by the women; and apparently owned by the

women. Strachey's description of people hiding their valuables (including corn) from one another indicates that Powhatan couples did not have community property, nor did men own things "in right of" their wives. Further, Spelman writes that shovels ranked high among the English goods bought by the Powhatans in the early years of the Jamestown colony; they replaced the women's crooked sticks and were apparently purchased by the women themselves. The women in our hamlet produce several things that English traders will soon want: corn, beans, and "tryed [rendered] deares suyt [suet] made up handsomely in Cakes."<sup>29</sup> And when the hungry English try to buy corn from men in the Indian towns, they may be dickering with the wrong people.

Work Party No. 2 may have the same personnel as No. 1 for it consists of women gathering the berries and greens that are ready to eat on this May day.<sup>30</sup> The best places for such gathering are recently abandoned fields (for the greens) and older fallow fields and woodland edges that have thicketlike growth in them (for the berries). The sensible time to do the gathering is on the way home from the current cornfields, if one is to heed the adage "Never return empty-handed." Women do this kind of foraging daily; men who are courting women also collect berries rather than flowers on the way home from the hunt.<sup>31</sup> Berry and greens picking can be surprisingly physical work; so is the job of humping home the proceeds, especially with a child in a cradleboard on one's back. There are also real dangers involved in coming and going to fields that are not always next door to one's house. There is always the possibility that warriors from enemy tribes (and even rival tribes within the Powhatan paramount chiefdom) will try to abduct a woman or girl, though late fall is a more likely time for it to happen. Snakes are less likely to lurk and bite when a group of women comes along talking animatedly. But twisted ankles away from home and brier scratches that become easily infected are misfortunes that can happen at any time and that sensible people, male and female, avert by making offerings to various kinds of *okeus* (minor deities) before setting out from town.<sup>32</sup>

Work Party No. 3 may have the same personnel as Nos. 1 and 2, for it involves gathering the firewood that each family uses daily (7). The "never empty-handed" adage applies here, too, as does the necessity of making offerings to avert dangers in the woods. The mature forest to the east of the village and old fields that have grown up beyond the thicket stage produce dead branches that can be carried or dragged home. Just as fields become played out from farming, so do the neighboring woods become cleared of their detritus, giving the women a second motive for moving some of their farming operations each year. Even when there is plenty of

burnable wood nearby, it is heavy, ungainly work to bring in enough to keep the house fires going all day, every day. Firewood collection plus the fetching of water and carrying of children gives Powhatan women (like other Woodland Indian women) an effective load-bearing workout daily.<sup>33</sup> It should be no surprise to us that Louis Hennepin writes, "The women act as porters, and have so much vigor, that there are few men in Europe who have as much as they."<sup>34</sup>

While the three work parties are out, there are other females of various ages who have stayed in the hamlet this morning. Children in the toddler stage are not really equipped to walk with their mothers on a trek into the woods and fields, so they have stayed home with adults or older siblings watching them (8). The caregivers can be of either sex, but women probably predominate; it is they who do the first naming of young children.<sup>35</sup> Discipline is lenient: The children are given a great deal of autonomy, and the watchers of children are also doing other jobs.<sup>36</sup> The day's stew is under way in each household (9) and is added to as people return to the hamlet. Stew, one of the mainstays of Powhatan life, varies in the course of the day, depending on who has been doing what (and with how much success) and how rapidly people's snacking has depleted the pot.<sup>37</sup> As men and boys bring in animal carcasses (10), women butcher these;<sup>38</sup> as people bring in fish, women gut them; as boys bring in shellfish, women cook and open them; as women bring in greens, these are cooked in the stew, while berries are either dried or baked in bread; and flour is thrown in for thickening. During much of the year, the thickener would be cornmeal; at this season it is pounded-up tuckahoe (see below).

Work Party No. 4 is busy right there in the hamlet, building a house (11, with a bit of artistic license used). The Indian Village interpreters at Jamestown Settlement have found that a Powhatan-style house has to be rebuilt every three to five years. All-day-every-day smoking from hearths might make a house last a little longer, but real-life Powhatans do not necessarily want their houses in one location for that long, given the continuing exhaustion of fields and firewood resources. So a new house is going up as a family moves into our view, and soon one of the other houses will probably be left to fall down as its family moves farther away. House building is women's work, and since some of their work is in several fixed locations during any year, while men must move farther afield on the hunt, it is likely that the sites of houses—and, by extension, the location of the hamlet itself—are the result of women's decisions.<sup>39</sup> A great deal of preparation has had to precede the actual erection of this house. Saplings have been cut and seasoned in a bent position among the upper internal posts of an existing house.<sup>40</sup> Cordage was made and reeds were gathered last

winter, and the two have been combined into a large number of mats (if bark were being used, it would have been gathered in April and seasoned in flattened form thereafter). More cordage will be needed for lashings. Now the erecting is under way, and it requires at least two people, preferably more. Two parallel lines of holes, with more holes to make rounded ends, have been dug and bent saplings placed in them; spaces are left for two doors. Sapling crosspieces are then lashed onto the uprights, starting with the lowest and moving upward, so that the workers can stand on the crosspieces already affixed. The weight of women working from each side bends the uprights over further so that they meet and can be lashed together to make a barrel roof (hence the necessity of at least two people working opposite each other). Finally, the mats are lashed on in shingle fashion, from top to bottom (lower crosspieces still having to serve as ladders), leaving a gap for the smoke hole, which will have a movable cover installed as the very last thing. The work goes even faster (half a day should do it) if there are many experienced women and older girls working at once, as well as a few young children handing materials to the women working aloft.

Work Party No. 5 is going up to Gordon or Nettles Creek to get tuckahoe. There are several tuber-producing plants that bear the label; arrow arum (*Peltandra virginica*) is the one with the largest tubers and is today the only tuckahoe species growing in the lower Chickahominy River. All the plants grow in fresh or nearly fresh marshes,<sup>41</sup> and the big arrow arum tubers grow especially deep, twelve to eighteen inches down in the mud. Smith writes merely that "in one day a Savage will gather sufficient for a weeke"—a deceptive statement, since the expedition requires multiple people performing some very heavy labor.<sup>42</sup>

The most efficient way to get to the premier *Peltandra*-collecting places and then transport the tubers home is by canoe (5), which we already know requires at least three people. There is a real potential danger in making this or any other canoe trip. Squalls can occur at almost any time of year in eastern Virginia, but they are especially frequent on late spring afternoons. A squall can whip up any waterway with sufficient open space into a boiling mass of waves that can swamp a canoe or, if the occupants are luckier, blow it onto the nearest shore. The lower Chickahominy is about half a mile wide and with storm winds can become dangerous even to modern outboard-motor boats. Also, spring squalls usually bring lightning, making anyone in a boat or working out in a wide marsh into a target. It is likely that the women of Work Party No. 5 made offerings and prayers to the okeus of storms before they left the hamlet.

The best time to go after *Peltandra* is when the tide is about medium-

high: high enough that there is slow-moving water to wash the mud off the plants but not so high that deeper water seriously hinders one's movements. Digging and washing are easier at the edges of the channels that cut through the marshes. The actual digging of arrow arum is best done by a team of two or three adults, who surround a clump of plants and use long, stout sticks with chisel-like ends to pry them up out of the mud. An alternative is for the adults to sit around the clump, burrowing around and under it with both hands and feet. The process can take up to twenty minutes for each clump because of the toughness of *Peltandra's* root system. The starchy tubers float on water, so the plant has anchored them well down in the mud with several thick fleshy roots (easy to cut through) and a myriad of thin, wiry rootlets (hard to chop, since the little wretches have the tensile strength of steel hawsers). As the first team of adults moves on to another clump, a second team of adults or children washes the mud from the loosened first clump, cuts off the leaves, separates the tubers, and tosses them into the canoe.

Preparation of the tubers begins immediately, for Grandmaw is sitting there in the canoe. She is only in her late thirties, but the hard physical life she has led has already caused her to develop arthritis.<sup>43</sup> Paddling and digging have become painful, but she can be useful nonetheless, first and foremost by using her paddle as a rudder for the canoe when it is under way. Now she does another job that needs doing: whittling away the rinds and truncated roots and rootlets on the outside of the *Peltandra*. Every subterranean part of *Peltandra* is full of oxalic acid. Even the little rootlets sting one's hands, unless one applies grease ahead of time or, like Powhatan females who are more than a few years old, one has thoroughly callused hands. No one wants to create piles of nettlelike rinds in the hamlet, where one could blunder into them while preoccupied or when answering a midnight call of nature. So it makes sense for Grandmaw to cut off and chuck the rinds into the creek, where the tide will carry them away from the canoe and the people working near it. In the course of a few hours, the potato-sized tubers grow into a large mound in the canoe.

Once returned to the hamlet, the women will slice the white, starchy tubers and then neutralize the acid in them, either by sun-drying (12) or by baking them in an earth oven for twenty-four hours.<sup>44</sup> The battle is still not over, for once dried, *Peltandra* is very hard stuff to reduce to flour by mortar and pestle. The grainy result blends unwillingly with other ingredients and, depending on the cooking technique used, tastes like pure starch or like dirt.<sup>45</sup> But arrow arum is an abundant species with two overwhelming advantages that make it worth working with for Powhatan women: First, the paramount chief Powhatan does not want it in tribute, so it is "tax

free." Second, it is a native plant and therefore far more drought-resistant than domesticated corn and beans. People use it for bread until the corn crop comes in. In the dry summer of 1607, the people in our hamlet will be eating it longer than usual—and giving thanks that it is there.

Work Party No. 6 may have the same personnel as Work Party No. 5, though given the bounteous haul of tuckahoe that fills the canoe, the No. 6 project is likely to be a separate endeavor. At least once a day people visit their fish weirs (13) and remove fish from them. The best time to do it is at low tide, though it is more difficult to launch or land canoes then. The weir is an arrow-shaped trap made of saplings set side by side in fairly shallow water, and the ultimate round or square enclosure at the end (not shown in my drawing) is not lined with a net, as in modern Chesapeake-region fish weirs.<sup>46</sup> The fish must be dipped out of the trap with a net tied onto a long-handled stick.<sup>47</sup> Therefore it is less work to do the dipping at a time of day when the water is not very deep. It is a task that can physically be done by people of either sex from childhood onward. The English accounts list fishing as men's work, but I wonder about how exclusively male the weir fishing is, given the number of trips women make onto the water for foraging or visiting across the river. That should be especially true in the spring, when the weirs fill up fairly fast with the shad and herring that are going up the James and Chickahominy Rivers to spawn.<sup>48</sup> April and May are the big fishing season, and therefore the big fish-drying season (logically, the main time to eat the smoked product will be the next winter, when fish are hard to come by and people's diets need more variety). The people in the hamlet want to collect as many fish as possible, and the usual rule about fishing being "men's work" may not apply at present to the weirs. Large catches mean heavy weights being hauled into a canoe and propelled homeward, but the women are accustomed to moving heavy burdens around.

When they are not away from the hamlet on various expeditions, women of various ages are continuously engaged in many jobs that they can do alone but choose to do in sociable company. All of these jobs require materials that are gathered and cleaned or prepared ahead of time; some of them have to be worked on at intervals across several days, though not necessarily on a rigid schedule.

Baskets, the Powhatans' major storage containers, are made of a wide variety of materials and in a large array of sizes, and, being very biodegradable, they must be replaced often. There is always a need for more cordage, for net and bag making, and for ongoing house repairs. Twining the pre-gathered and pre-cleaned fibers (different plants provide these at varying seasons) has been second nature to the women since early childhood: Their

hands do it "on automatic pilot" while they visit and mind the toddlers (8). Some of the finished cordage will be used to sew mats. Mats are a truly multipurpose item: Depending on their thickness, they become shingles for houses, covers on beds, and "rugs" to sit on (people prefer not to place their bare buttocks on the ground, where chiggers lurk). The reeds for the mats were chopped down in the marshes last winter and hauled home by canoe. Gordon and Nettles Creeks have sizable *Phragmites* marshes, and there are more reeds in the sloughs in and near Jamestown Island, seven miles down the James from our hamlet. Reeds, when collected into bundles, are surprisingly heavy; manipulating them and making a longish paddle home is within the scope of women's work, needless to say.

One of the women in the hamlet is potting today (14). She has already dug and cleaned the clay, which is most accessible along the stream banks of the region (I am not sure precisely where, though there is at least one spot on Jamestown Island). Getting potting clay excavated and carried home is therefore most efficiently carried out by canoe. The woman has already kneaded the clay and crushed and added the tempering agent (shells in the Paspahugh area), after which she has stored the clay in damp fibers until she is ready to deal with it. Now she is building her pot, one fillet at a time and smoothing the sides as she goes. It is slow, careful work, and a large stewpot can take two or more days to build. Several days from now, after the pot has dried, she will gather and use a good deal of firewood in baking the pot hard.

The woman scraping a hide before tanning (15) represents the numerous things that women did with deer products. Hides are made into aprons for women, breechclouts for men, and protective leggings and warm mantles for both sexes. The tanning process takes several days and involves stretching a fresh hide on a sapling-and-twine framework, drying it there at least overnight, actively scraping it for several hours to remove tissue and (if desired) the hair, soaking it for at least two hours and preferably overnight in a solution of water and the deer's brain, and then drying it all day again before smoking it. All of this means regular attention to any one hide across at least a three-day period, which can be interrupted at various points if necessary. Meanwhile, the woman is making other inedible parts of the deer useful to her family. She takes the tendons from the carcass, dries them, and separates them into sinew-thread for sewing. She breaks up the larger bones and slowly hand-grates pieces into shape as needles, awls, and the like. Women also chisel out wooden utensils such as spoons, mortars, and platters as needed. Grating or chiseling things into shape with stone tools is something else that women and men alike have been doing since childhood, their hands working "on automatic pilot" as they talk and mind the smaller children.



There is a dugout canoe a-making in the hamlet (16). That is another job that requires many days of patient though not-too-arduous labor to accomplish, for the standard coastal Algonquian method is to burn patches in a log, then scrape out the charcoal, burn more patches, and so on, until a trough results. In actual practice, someone has to be nearby and reasonably attentive during both phases of the work. Cypress and other conifer woods burn rapidly, and even a small fire can go right through the side of a log with surprising speed.<sup>49</sup> Getting the bottom right, when working with fire, requires both alertness and skill. I have found out the hard way that dugouts are very tippy affairs. It takes a wide, fairly flat bottom to make comfortable the kind of feet or knees-on-the-floor paddling that the early engravings show and that most people connect with canoe transportation. A more careless V-shaped interior is easier to produce, but the only way to propel it in any comfort is to stand up on the canoe's gunwales, as shown in the drawing (5). This is how Indians are described as paddling canoes in the only historical source to come from Virginia: Col. Henry Norwood's Eastern Shore account.<sup>50</sup> It is also the way I would prefer to paddle even a flat-floored canoe full of *Peltandra* tubers, which could sting me where I don't have calluses. In any case, canoe makers have to pay attention during both the burning and the scraping phase. Men and boys can do it by themselves, as shown in the 1590 de Bry engraving, during their rest periods.<sup>51</sup> But if people want the process to go faster, then women and girls have to be involved, too. Considering the tendency of people to make the tools they use, and also the continual use women make of canoes in their own work, I suggest that Powhatan women as well as men worked at making canoes.

There are still other women's jobs not shown in the drawing. There are elderly and perhaps sick or injured younger people to nurse (I assume that the English accounts' silence on the subject indicates a similarity to English practices of the time). Women serve as barbers, using sharp-edged mussel shells to keep the right side of male heads shaved, as well as shaving girls' heads and trimming one another's hair. The women are the major people responsible for the decorative arts practiced in the hamlet. As Strachey puts it, they embroider much of the exposed flesh on their bodies with tattooing, which they do for one another. They also produce valuables and fancy clothing for the chief and his wives, if not for themselves.

The Powhatan society to which our hamlet belongs has two kinds of "shell money," actually shell beads that can be sewn with sinew onto garments or strung and used as jewelry or as payments. *Peak*, or *wampum-peak*, comes from whelk and clam shells in salty waters in and around the Chesapeake Bay, so the Paspahigh people in our hamlet would have it only by trade. However, *roanoke* disks are made of mussel shells, and there are

several kinds of mussels in the freshwater reaches of the James River and its tributaries.<sup>52</sup> The bluffs along the James River also have fossil "marginella" (*Prunum limatulum*) shells in them; these little univalves comprise the embroidery on the famous "Powhatan's Mantle."<sup>53</sup> Disks or tubes for shell beads have to be fashioned slowly, first by making a groove and scraping it ever deeper with a stone knife until the piece breaks off (with thick whelk or clam shell, it can take a couple of hours) and then slowly abrading the sharp edges away. Afterward the beads have to have holes drilled in them for stringing; with a bow drill it can be done quickly, though the relatively thick stone bit may cause breakage to be high.<sup>54</sup> Freshwater pearls are another kind of valuable, worn in strings or embroidered onto deerskins. Most of them are probably imported into the lower Chesapeake region, but any found locally have been retrieved from mussels opened in cooking and then drilled.<sup>55</sup> The result is a purplish pearl with a large hole through it (by our standards).<sup>56</sup> Either men or women can prepare shell beads and pearls for stringing (the English accounts are silent about who did it); embroidery probably falls to the women.

Women are the ones who make puccoon. The root of true puccoon (*Lithospermum carolinense*) has to be traded into the Powhatan area, an activity in which women may have participated.<sup>57</sup> Once acquired, according to Strachey, the women reduce it to powder and mix it with walnut oil or bear grease, and then both sexes paint it onto their heads and shoulders and consider themselves made handsomer.

Feather mantles are a spectacular product of women's work. Men hunt ducks and geese in spring and fall and wild turkeys all the year. Women cook the carcasses and keep the feathers for weaving into the netted fabric of mantles. Wild turkey mantles are not uncommon, even in our hamlet, though they are more likely to be worn by members of chiefly families. But the showiest version for miles around, and one of the most laborious in the long term, is the feather cloak worn by the favorite wife of Pipsco, a chief living across the James from our hamlet. The women in our hamlet have surely seen it; they may have contributed feathers for it. Strachey will see it in 1610-11 and describe it thusly: "like a side cloak, made of blew feathers, so arteificially [cleverly] and thick sowed together, that yt shows like a deepe purple Satten, and is very smooth and sleek."<sup>58</sup> It is the color of the feathers that indicates how much labor went into that mantle. The only feasible source for bluish-purple feathers in the Chesapeake region is the speculum band on the wings of black ducks (close relatives of mallards, whose specula are blue-green). Black ducks are easy for the men of our hamlet to acquire in numbers,<sup>59</sup> but each duck only produces about fourteen usable speculum feathers. Even then, only the outer half of each

feather, where it is not overlapped by its neighbor, is purple, the rest being dark gray; one feather yields only a three-by-three-quarters-inch expanse of purple.<sup>60</sup> It must have taken a tremendous number of feathers, contributed or traded by women whose men were shooting black ducks over a period of *years*, to make that cloak.

One of the women belonging to the hamlet is staying out of my drawing altogether because she is menstruating. When their periods come, Powhatan women seclude themselves in a house out of people's way for fear of endangering the men and ruining their hunting. It is something of a vacation, quite pleasant if a woman does not suffer from cramps. Other women bring her food, possibly already cooked, and they and her female children can visit her freely.<sup>61</sup>

Still another woman, moving freely about the hamlet, is very pregnant. She does not slacken in her work, however, so she stays fit. That fitness and her remaining well nourished even in spring, because she lives where tuckahoe and runs of spawning fish are plentiful, will help her carry her fetus to term and deliver it "easily," to use Smith's term. Other Woodland Indian women had similarly easy deliveries. According to Lawson, "The *Indian Women* will run up and down the Plantation, the same day, very briskly, and without any sign of Pain or Sickness; yet they look very meager and thin." Williams makes a specific connection between physical fitness and quick recovery from childbirth: Southern New England Indian women had easy deliveries because of the seasonal farming and clamming and daily corn-pounding labors they performed. He adds that he had "often knowne in one Quarter of an houre a Woman merry in the House, and delivered and merry again; and within two dayes abroad, and after foure or five dayes at worke, &c." Daniel Gookin, writing of the same region, makes claims for an even shorter recovery time: The women "many times are so strong, that within a few hours after the child's birth, they will go about their ordinary occasions."<sup>62</sup>

I have shown the women in my drawing working out in the sun. In reality some of them, like the men in the picture, would have been doing their jobs in the comfort of sapling-and-mat shades (17). These open-sided affairs have lofts on which they put "their Corne, and fish to dry," and people also visit and "eate, sleepe and [cook] their meate" there when they want a place that is both cool and well lit.<sup>63</sup> Shades of this sort are ideal for men resting from the hunt or women resting from digging tuckahoe (but still twining cordage, grating deer bones into needles, etc., "on automatic pilot"). One can be refreshed without missing anything that is going on in the hamlet.

Everyone is home by late afternoon. Depleted as they may be, the

stewpots' contents are at their most varied, considering all the different food-getting activities that have gone on today; fish and animal carcasses are roasting, and more fish has been laid up to dry. The thumping of pestles in mortars sounds all over the hamlet as women pound more tuckahoe to make bread for the evening meal. As the sun goes down, people make offerings to okeus in thanks for a day of safety and success in getting food. They are free to eat before and after the ritual, if they are hungry, and most of them are. No roasted meat will be left over, nor will much stew.

In the evening, after a typically long, strenuous day, women and men alike will sing and dance!<sup>64</sup> The dancing is "coed," though the dancers do not touch one another, and it is active enough to burn up most of the energy left over from the day's tasks. It probably also burns away the frustrations that some people feel in having to work closely on a daily basis with people who may irritate them. Further, it is a chance for both sexes to attract premarital or extramarital partners, through dancing well and by singing what Strachey calls "amorous ditties" (how I wish he had given details). As the evening grows late, people will disappear from the dance ground into their houses (or other people's if they have an assignation). There many of them, with or without much privacy, embrace their partners, for as Strachey observes, these strong, active people, male and female, are "most voluptuous . . . incredible yt is, with what heat both Sexes of them are given over to those Intemperances."<sup>65</sup> Even the lustiest individuals, however, will eventually fall asleep.

Powhatan women were active, productive, and in many ways autonomous components of the Virginia Indian population. Far from being unwilling victims who were made to do the farming by lazy males, they knew their work, made doing it a social occasion, and reaped a reward of power in the family for their efforts. They foraged for a wide variety of plants, which would have been impossible to do randomly with any success. They had to know which things were appropriate to what uses, where they grew, and in what season they were worth collecting. That required a very good memory. I have found that just the native wild *edible* plants in eastern Virginia number about eleven hundred species. The differing habitats that had to be visited at the same time, and the wide variety of other jobs that I have shown women tackling, meant that they had to do some careful scheduling to get everything done.

Women did work that could vary greatly in a day, as I have shown; their work varied even more if we consider the annual round. The word *drudgery*, with its implication of being tied to the eternal repetition of unpleasant labor, simply does not apply to their lives. Not only did Powhatan

women's work vary, but it also had the women moving in and out of town continually. Further, it was not necessarily unpleasant, because women could pace themselves and visit with one another as they went about their business.

All of the different kinds of women's tasks could be done in company, and certain of the jobs, like house building and anything that involved canoe travel, required group effort if they were to be done at all. Living and working constantly in close proximity to other women, even congenial ones, probably created several other traits in Powhatan culture that are poorly documented in the surviving English accounts. Neither the women nor anyone else except the priests could afford to value privacy and solitude. The intensely cooperative life, lived mostly outside the house walls even when people were "at home," would have precluded such things. As a corollary, one of the most effective ways to punish someone in that society would be ostracism, not only painful to people reared in such an environment but also economically detrimental. As another corollary, it is likely that the early-seventeenth-century Powhatans resembled the mid-eighteenth-century Delawares, Munsis, and others so vividly described by Zeisberger: They kept up a peaceful, cooperative front, while their aggressions went underground, taking the form of gossip and even witchcraft.<sup>66</sup> Even the great Powhatan's daughter Pocahontas was afraid of witchcraft. Until she converted to Anglicanism and received a new name, Rebecca, she would not reveal her personal name, Matoaka, "in a superstitious feare of hurte by the English if her name were knowne."<sup>67</sup>

Women who grew up working together in groups at tasks in which men participated little or not at all would also grow up having relatively little in common with those men and expecting little psychological intimacy with them. The men, for their part, were so focused in on performing as great hunters and daring warriors that they could probably spare little emotional energy for understanding a sex whose life experiences were so different from theirs. People sought emotional intimacy within their own sex, for only there could one find real understanding. Powhatan men would also have lacked Europeans' ideas about men's "needing" to supervise or "take care of" members of the "weaker" sex. The physical robustness of the women and the amount of time they spent working geographically apart from men would have made such ideas irrelevant. Powhatan men and women, like those in other Eastern Woodland tribes, would have valued each other as economic partners and sought one another out as sexual partners, kinship distance permitting.<sup>68</sup> But most men and women appreciated and respected one another without feeling very close, except for the affection allowed between close blood relatives. Zeisberger describes

the situation vividly, albeit for the Delawares of a later century: "It is a common saying among them, 'My wife is not my friend,' that is, she is not related to me and I am not concerned about her, she is only my wife."<sup>69</sup>

Having the two sexes belong to two different but moderately overlapping worlds allowed Powhatan men and women to live more comfortably with some facts of their marital lives that English writers like Strachey describe explicitly. Polygyny works better, with less strife between cowives as well as husband and wives, if husband and wives do not expect a great deal of each other's time and attention. Affairs, permitted to women with husbands' permission (apparently often given) and seemingly free for men to engage in, were less likely to cause jealousy if husband and wife were not even supposed to be emotionally close. Chiefly marriages, which required a separation after the birth of one child, were also easier for the parties to bear when little intimacy developed between them. Temporary marriage by contract, with the time period stated and renewable by mutual agreement, was less likely to inflict pain on less involved participants when one partner wanted to continue the relationship while the other one contemplated ending it.

As the customs just described show, Powhatan women had a great deal of autonomy from men in the sexual realm as well as in the economic one. Their making few public appearances as political or religious leaders misled visiting English colonists into assuming that they were dominated by and considered far inferior to men. Yet, as I hope my description of their economic lives has shown, the women's hard and varied physical work was done with little input from men. And since it contributed many highly valued things that men's labors did not, women's economic autonomy was related to, if not a contributing cause of, their sexual freedom in marriage. Both argue strongly that on an everyday basis, women were considered—by men as well as by themselves—an esteemed and vital half of Powhatan society.

## Notes

This essay was originally delivered as the 1994 Presidential Address to the American Society for Ethnohistory. I am grateful to James Axtell and William Fisher for their comments on an earlier draft.

- 1 John Smith, "A Map of Virginia," including "The Proceedings of the English Colonie," comp. William Simmond, in *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1580-1631)*, ed. Philip L. Barbour, 3 vols. (Chapel Hill, NC, 1986), 1:119-90; William Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, ed. Louis B. Wright and Virginia Freund (London, 1953); Henry Spelman, "Re-

- lation of Virginia" (1613?), in *The Travels and Works of Captain John Smith: President of Virginia and Admiral of New England, 1580-1631*, ed. Edward Arber and A. G. Bradley, 2 vols. (New York, 1910), 1:ci-cxiv.
- 2 John Witthoft's words ring true for me: "The [aboriginal] American communities differed [from Neolithic Old World ones] in that their productive economy was *botanically centered* in all of its details, with no significant domesticated animals. There was a horticultural rather than an agricultural flavor to all of its cultivation" ("Eastern Woodlands Community Typology and Acculturation," in *Symposium on Cherokee and Iroquois Culture*, ed. William N. Fenton and John Gulick, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin No. 180 [Washington, DC, 1961], 72). Emphasis mine. I would extend this "botanical centeredness" into much, though by no means all, of the Powhatans' foraging-based economy as well.
  - 3 I am especially indebted to the village's supervisor, Erik Holland, and Timothy Cameron (an instructor in culinary arts) for going out on expeditions into the marshes with me (Peter Vratos also helped on one of them) and to Cameron for his work in reconstructing how the things gathered could have been made palatable.
  - 4 For a broad (perhaps too broad) overview see Robert S. Grumet, "Sunksquaws, Shamans, and Tradeswomen: Middle Atlantic Coastal Algonkian Women during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock (New York, 1980), 43-62.
  - 5 Helen C. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture* (Norman, OK, 1989), chap. 6.
  - 6 Smith, "Map of Virginia," 162 ("painefull"), 159 ("from hand to mouth").
  - 7 Single-sex work parties are also recorded for other Woodland groups, notably the Iroquois (W. M. Beauchamp, "Iroquois Women," *Journal of American Folklore* 13 [1900]: 82; Martha Champion Randle, "Iroquois Women Then and Now," in *Symposium on Local Diversity in Iroquois Culture*, ed. William N. Fenton, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin No. 149 [Washington, DC, 1951], 171) and the Algonquians of southern New England (Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* [1643], ed. John J. Teunissen and Evelyn J. Hinz [Detroit, MI, 1973], 170).
  - 8 John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina*, ed. Hugh Talmage Lefler (Chapel Hill, NC, 1967), 196; Williams, *Language of America*, 207; David Zeisberger, "David Zeisberger's History of the Northern American Indians," ed. Archer Butler Hulbert and William Nathaniel Schwarze, *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 19 (1910): 80. Zeisberger's account is late for Delaware lifeways, but I think he still remains useful for the more conservative parts of culture, such as sex roles and child-rearing patterns.
  - 9 Nicholas M. Lucketti, Mary Ellen M. Hodges, and Charles T. Hodges, *Paspahugh Archaeology: Data Recovery Investigations of Site 44JC308 at the Governor's Land at Two Rivers, James City County, Virginia* (Williamsburg, VA, 1994).
  - 10 European trade goods were found in several but not all burials within the hamlet, and the Paspahughs were dispersed and their territory taken over by the English by 1611 (Helen C. Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries* [Norman, OK, 1990], 55).
  - 11 Robert L. Hodges, P. Ben Sabo, David McCloy, and C. Kent Staples, *Soil*

*Survey of James City and York Counties and the City of Williamsburg, Virginia* (Washington, DC, 1985).

- 12 For a superb (and clearly printed) replication of the John Smith map see Edward W. Haile, "Virginia Discovered and Discribed by Captayn John Smith, 1608" (Champlain, VA, 1995). Mr. Haile is a surveyor by trade and Algonquian linguist by avocation. At this writing, he is about to issue a second map, after consulting with me and with several archaeologists in the region, this time showing the Indian towns placed on a modern base map.
- 13 Strachey writes that while some people covered themselves with mats or skins, others slept "stark naked on the grownd" (*Historie of Travell*, 79). Williams indicates that the Narragansetts and others did the latter: "Their Fire is instead of our bedcloaths"; he also notes that the first person awake "must reparaire the Fire" (*Language of America*, 107).
- 14 The only Virginia witnesses for partitions are Spelman (implied by "windinges and turnings" inside the house ["Relation of Virginea," cvi]) and Col. [Henry] Norwood ("A Voyage to Virginia by Col. Norwood," in *Tracts and Other Papers*, ed. Peter Force [New York, 1949], 3 [10]: 36).
- 15 Lawson wrote of "trading girls": "If the old People are in the same Cabin along with them [the girl and her European-trader partner] all Night, they lie as unconcern'd, as if they were so many Logs of Wood" (*New Voyage to Carolina*, 190).
- 16 On the moss target see Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 113. On snacking: "At all hours of the night whenever they are awake they go to the *Hominy-pot*" (John Clayton, "The Aborigines of the Country: Letter to Dr. Nehemiah Grew" [1687], in *The Reverend John Clayton, a Parson with a Scientific Mind: His Scientific Writings and Other Related Papers*, ed. Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy S. Berkeley [Charlottesville, VA, 1965], 37).
- 17 William N. Fenton has written evocatively of the years before grocery-store cornmeal became so common among the Iroquois, when one would "awake to the thump and laughter of women pounding corn for breakfast" ("Long-Term Trends of Change among the Iroquois," in *Cultural Stability and Cultural Change: Proceedings of the 1957 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society*, ed. Verne F. Ray [Seattle, WA, 1957], 34).
- 18 Based on an analogy with men's deciding each evening on where to do the next day's communal hunting in the fall (John Smith, "A True Relation," in *Complete Works*, 1:60).
- 19 "Many of the Women are very handy in Canoes, and will manage them with great Dexterity and Skill, which they become accustomed to in this watry Country" (Lawson, *New Voyage to Carolina*, 91); see also the account of Creek women in a canoe saving a European in David Taitt, "Journal of David Taitt's Travels from Pensacola, West Florida, to and through the Country of the Upper and Lower Creeks, 1772," in *Travels in the American Colonies*, ed. Newton D. Mereness (New York, 1916), 514.
- 20 There is no information from Powhatan sources, and next to none from any other than matrilineal tribes like the Creeks, whose married couples lived in extended family compounds; the Powhatans were patrilineal, and I have found no clear evidence of extended family groupings among them for any purpose, though some very probably existed.



- 21 Strachey mentions contracts for second and later wives (*Historie of Travell*, 112); Samuel Purchas heard from Edward Maria Wingfield that older wives were for work, while younger wives were "for dalliance" (*Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 2d ed. [London, 1614], 768).
- 22 The lack of rainfall is inferred from evidence of a late-maturing corn crop in Smith, "True Relation," 35; and Edward Maria Wingfield, "Discourse," in *The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter*, ed. Philip L. Barbour (London, 1969), 216, 218. Corroboration has recently come from a dendrochronological study: David W. Stahle, Malcom K. Cleaveland, Dennis B. Blanton, Matthew D. Therrell, and David A. Gay, "The Lost Colony and Jamestown Droughts," *Science* 280 (1998): 564–67.
- 23 On planting tools see Spelman, "Relation of Virginea," cxi; on the size of fields see Smith, "Map of Virginia," 162; and Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 79.
- 24 See the Gribellin engraving in Robert Beverley, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, ed. Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill, NC, 1947), 172.
- 25 On the southern New England Algonquians see Williams, *Language of America*, 206 ("untill the child be weaned, which with some is long after a yeare old"); on the Delawares see John Heckewelder, *An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States* (Philadelphia, 1819), 216 (usually two years, sometimes up to four years).
- 26 Although Smith recorded Powhatan men "scorning to be seene in any womanlike exercise" ("Map of Virginia," 162), other Woodland Indian men occasionally helped their wives. Iroquois men might do it if needed, especially if no other men were around (Beauchamp, "Iroquois Women," 83; Merle H. Deardorff, "The Religion of Handsome Lake: Its Origins and Development," in Fenton, *Symposium on Local Diversity*, 86; Deardorff also notes that "it was part of their fixed belief that the bond between women and the crops was so close that only women could make them grow" [94]). Men among the Southern New England tribes would do it in old age, or in their younger years out of affection for their wives and children (Williams, *Language of America*, 170). Raymond D. Fogelson and Paul Kutsche have suggested, based on the writings of James Adair, William Bartram, and Martin Schneider, that Cherokee men may have done agricultural work—planting and harvesting but not weeding—more often than previously believed ("Cherokee Economic Cooperatives: The Gadugi," in Fenton and Gulick, *Symposium on Cherokee and Iroquois Culture*, 96–97). They also mention Huron men helping women in similar ways (115).
- 27 On the chief's field see Spelman, "Relation of Virginea," xcii; on the exhaustion of fields see E. Randolph Turner III, "An Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Study on the Evolution of Rank Societies in the Virginia Coastal Plan" (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1976), 194 (and he got his information from his agronomist brother, Thomas R. Turner).
- 28 White's painting is reproduced in Paul Hulton, *America, 1585: The Complete Drawings of John White* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984), 66; Williams, *Language of America*, 163.
- 29 On hiding and trade goods see Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 115; on shovels see Spelman, "Relation of Virginea," cxi.
- 30 For a list of possibilities see appendix C of Helen C. Rountree and Thomas E.

- Davidson, *Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland* (Charlottesville, VA, 1997).
- 31 Strachey is specific about courting gifts: "also of such Sommer fruictes and berryes, which their travell abroad hath made them knowe readily where to gather, and those of the best kinde of their season" (*Historie of Travell*, 112).
  - 32 "I have observed that . . . the least scratch is dangerous, & that for all the care that can be taken to prevent it, it often turns into a very desperate ulcerous sore" (Clayton, "Aborigines of the Country," 37).
  - 33 Williams writes, "It is almost incredible what burthens the poore women carry of Corne, of Fish, of Beanes, of Mats, and a childe besides" (*Language of America*, 122). Their strength was the more admirable when they traveled with their men, who moved fast on the trail or in the canoe (Lawson, *New Voyage to Carolina*, 20, 37, 176-77; John Bartram, Lewis Evans, and Conrad Weiser, *A Journey from Pennsylvania to Onondaga in 1743*, ed. Whitfield J. Bell Jr. [Barre, MA, 1973], 71, 84; Louis Hennepin, *A Description of Louisiana* [1683], trans. John Gilmary Shea [Ann Arbor, MI, 1966], 210, 212-13, 220).
  - 34 Hennepin, *Description of Louisiana*, 282.
  - 35 Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 113.
  - 36 Smith says only that "they love children verie dearly," implying leniency ("Map of Virginia," 162). Corroborative details come from the New England Algonquians (Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England* [1792; New York, 1970], 14) and the Delawares (Zeisberger, "David Zeisberger's History," 81, 99), as well as other Iroquoians and Muskogeans.
  - 37 A variety of ingredients are mentioned by Smith and Strachey. Stew with various things in it was also the ordinary food for the New England Algonquians (Froelich G. Rainey, "A Compilation of Historical Data Contributing to the Ethnography of Connecticut and Southern New England Indians," *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Connecticut* 3 [1936]: 18 [citing Gookin, Champlain, and Williams]).
  - 38 I show this deer carcass already gutted, which is the common practice today to keep the meat more palatable to us. John Banister writes that "the Indians" made a broth of deer "head and humbles," or entrails, but he may not be speaking of the Powhatans (*John Banister and His Natural History of Virginia, 1678-1692*, ed. Joseph Ewan and Nesta Ewan [Urbana, IL, 1970], 376).
  - 39 On house building as women's work see Spelman, "Relation of Virginea," cvii-cviii; and Stanley Pargellis, ed., "The Indians of Virginia" (1688; authorship uncertain), *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 16 (1959): 232. On the other hand, men among the southern New England tribes cut and prepared the saplings; women set them up and made and affixed the mats (Williams, *Language of America*, 117, 121). The hypothesis that women chose housing sites is feasible for the dispersed-settlement pattern characteristic of most Powhatan towns; for the nucleated, palisaded towns that have been found archaeologically near the fall line (a boundary with the hostile Monacans/Mannahoacs), the decision making was probably in the hands of men.
  - 40 The Jamestown Settlement staff have found this to be the most efficient way; the alternative is to stake the saplings horizontally on the ground outdoors, where they can be tripped over.
  - 41 Other species include arrowheads (*Sagittaria* spp., especially *S. latifolia*, wapato

or broad-leaved arrowhead) and golden club (*Orontium aquaticum*), all of which demand completely fresh water. Today the Chickahominy's mouth is slightly brackish; four centuries ago, with the sea level three or four feet lower, those waters may have been entirely fresh.

- 42 Smith, "Map of Virginia," 153.
- 43 The skeletons of both sexes begin to show arthritis around age thirty (Donna Boyd, pers. com., 1994).
- 44 Smith, "Map of Virginia," 153-54.
- 45 Timothy Cameron continues to experiment with it. He gives a preliminary report in Helen C. Rountree, Mary C. Rountree, Erik L. Holland, and Timothy W. Cameron, "'It Is Strange to See How Their Bodies Alter with Their Diet': Powhatan Nutrition in Relation to the Annual Cycle" (paper presented at the Twenty-seventh Algonquian Conference, Chapel Hill, NC, October 1995).
- 46 For a copy of de Bry's 1590 erroneous engraving and a modern corrected diagram see Rountree, *Powhatan Indians of Virginia*, 36-37.
- 47 Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 75.
- 48 Today these fish spawn in the James and its tributaries above Hog Island, which is opposite Jamestown Island and seven miles downstream from our hamlet (Office of the Secretary of Commerce and Resources, *Proposals for Coastal Resources Management in Virginia* [Richmond, VA, 1977], map 14). With the sea level three or so feet lower in 1607, their spawning area would have extended downstream from its present limit.
- 49 Henry Bond, Indian Village interpreter at Jamestown Settlement, pers. com., 1994.
- 50 Norwood, "Voyage to Virginia," 31 (they "place their feet on the starboard and larboard sides of the boat, and with this fickle footing so they heave it forward").
- 51 De Bry's engraving, based on a lost painting by John White, is reproduced in Hulton, *America*, 1585, 118.
- 52 On the shells used see Beverley, *History and Present State of Virginia*, 228; on the salinities in which they occur see Alice Jane Lippson and Robert L. Lippson, *Life in the Chesapeake Bay* (Baltimore, MD, 1984), 210-11. The freshwater mussels large enough to be worth gathering for food as well as shells include the blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) (R. Tucker Abbott, *American Seashells: The Marine Mollusks of the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts of North America*, 2d ed. [New York, 1974], 428); the eastern floater (*Anodonta cataracta*) (Arthur H. Clarke, *The Freshwater Molluscs of Canada* [Ottawa, ON, 1981], 294); and the yellow lamp-mussel (*Lampsilis cariosa*), the delicate lamp-mussel (*L. ochracea*), and the eastern lamp-mussel (*L. radiata*) (ibid., 336, 340, 342).
- 53 This identification was pointed out to me by malacologist Gary Coovert (pers. com., 1991).
- 54 Terry Bond, Indian Village interpreter at Jamestown Settlement, pers. com., 1994.
- 55 The premier pearl-producing mussel is the eastern river pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*), which Clarke says occurs no farther south than the Little Schuylkill River in Pennsylvania today (*Freshwater Molluscs of Canada*, 248); the major fish host is the brook trout, which is not found in the streams of the Virginia coastal plan. However, both species may have come into the region during the "Little Ice Age."

- 56 This description has been compiled from multiple bits in English and Spanish accounts; see Rountree, *Powhatan Indians of Virginia*, 70n.
- 57 On the occurrence of the root in Sussex County, Virginia (Nottoway Indian territory), and in southeastern South Carolina see A. M. Harvill Jr., Ted R. Bradley, Charles E. Stevens, Thomas F. Wieboldt, Donna M. E. Ware, and Douglas W. Ogle, *Atlas of the Virginia Flora*, 2d ed. (Farmville, VA, 1986), 64; and Albert E. Radford, Harry E. Ahles, and C. Ritchie Bell, *Manual of the Vascular Flora of the Carolinas* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1968), 883. Puccoon from South Carolina probably traveled northward through the hands of the Tuscaroras, with whom the Powhatans are known to have had regular trading relations (Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 56–57). That women accompanied men is surmised by ethnographic analogy from the fact that other tribes' women went along on trading expeditions; see Helen C. Rountree, "The Powhatans and Other Woodland Indians as Travelers," in *Powhatan Foreign Relations, 1500–1722*, ed. Helen C. Rountree (Charlottesville, VA, 1993), 27–28.
- 58 Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 56–57.
- 59 That was true in 1607; today mallards are taking over the black duck range, and the black ducks, very close cousins, are merging with them genetically (Jane Scott, *Between Ocean and Bay: A Natural History of Delmarva* [Centreville, MD, 1991], 128).
- 60 I know this because, wanting to replicate Pipsco's wife's mantle, for several years now I have been collecting mallard and black duck speculum feathers, a few from roadkills and most of them molted in the summertime in various city parks. The mallards greatly outnumber the black ducks today.
- 61 Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 74; see also Lawson, *New Voyage to Carolina*, 117; Williams, *Language of America*, 86; and James Adair, *Adair's History of the American Indians (1775)*, ed. Samuel Cole Williams (1930; rpt. New York, 1974), 129–30. I have never forgotten a Winnebago menstrual house I saw in the 1980s: built like a bunkhouse, its roof sported a TV antenna.
- 62 Lawson, *New Voyage to Carolina*, 196; Williams, *Language of America*, 121, 207; Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 21. For another New England Algonquian reference see William Wood, *Wood's New England's Prospect* (1634; Amherst, MA, 1977), 108.
- 63 Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 78–79.
- 64 Spelman, "Relation of Virginea," xciv; Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 85–86; Beverley, *History and Present State of Virginia*, 224. Strachey and Beverley make it plain that dancing was a normal evening activity.
- 65 Strachey, *Historie of Travell*, 112–13.
- 66 These practices have been observed by many anthropologists; eyewitness accounts from Woodland Indian sources include Zeisberger, "David Zeisberger's History," 124, on lying and gossip; and Adair, *Adair's History*, 38–39, on witchcraft.
- 67 Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 3d ed. (London, 1617), 943.
- 68 The closely related Piscataways offer an ethnographic analogy: "They are generally very obedient to their husbands, and you shal seldome heare a woman speake in the presence of her husband, except he aske her some question" (Anonymous, "A Relation of Maryland, 1635," in *Narratives of Early Maryland, 1633–1684*, ed. Clayton Colman Hall [New York, 1910], 86). Among the Creeks, wives' greetings to their husbands returning from travel were so laconic

as to be wooden (Caleb Swan, "Position and State of Manners and Arts in the Creek, or Muscogee Nation in 1791," in *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, ed. Henry R. Schoolcraft, 6 vols. [Philadelphia, 1851-57], 5:274-75; Adair, *Adair's History*, 104-5). Lawson sums it up: "They never love beyond Retrieving their first Indifferency" (*New Voyage to Carolina*, 195).

69 Zeisberger, "David Zeisberger's History," 99. There were exceptions, of course; on rare occasions spouses killed themselves in jealousy or grief over the defection of their partners (*ibid.*, 83).

