

The Colony Changes: Africans, Women, and Tobacco

With the arrival of Africans and women, Jamestown was becoming a more diverse colony. Portuguese sailors captured African men and women from what is present-day Angola. In 1619, the first Africans arrived in Jamestown. There are no records to indicate if these Africans were considered slaves or indentured servants, but it is known that they arrived against their will. Indentured servants would work for a period of 5 to 7 years before being freed. The arrival of Africans would eventually make it possible to expand the planting and harvesting of tobacco.

In 1620 ninety young women landed in Jamestown on the *Bride Ship*. This ship was sent to Jamestown by the Virginia Company. If a man married one of the women from the *Bride Ship*, he had to repay the Virginia Company for her trip with part of his tobacco crop. The arrival of the women made it possible for the settlers to start families. These growing families made Jamestown a more permanent settlement.

In 1624, the king revoked the Virginia Company's Charters and took control of the English settlement. Jamestown was named the capital of the royal colony of Virginia. The economy of the colony depended on agriculture. It was the primary source of wealth. The most profitable agricultural product was tobacco. Tobacco became the cash crop of Virginia. This means that the farmers grew it to sell for money rather than for their personal use. Much of the colony's tobacco crop was sold in England. The tobacco farms soon grew so large they needed more and more workers to plant and harvest the crop. Before long, large numbers of Africans were brought to the colony against their will to work as slaves on the plantations. As a result of this very inexpensive labor, the colony of Virginia began to depend on slave labor. This dependence would last a long time.