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**Indians on the Eastern Shore of Virginia:
Evolving Relationships with the English and Powhatan Indians**

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Honors Thesis
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The Eastern Shore of Virginia in my home, and I have always been interested by

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because I sensed that I had barely scratched the surface of the material. I wanted to learn more, and one of my professors suggested that an honors thesis would give me the opportunity to do this independently and while providing a unique research experience for my history major.

My work parallels that of the author Helen C. Rountree who closely examined the Eastern Shore Indians in *Powhatan: Native Relations, 1584-1712: Powhatan's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia and Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland* which she co-authored with Thomas E. Davidson. Rountree wrote that the Eastern Shore Indians were part of the Powhatan chiefdom, but a separate and distinct group.

I do not believe my conclusions are dramatically different from those of Rountree and other historians because I am aware that the Accokeek and Uppocamuncks were a separate entity. I believe that I have examined the Accokeek and Uppocamuncks more thoroughly, and specifically their interaction with both the colonists on the peninsula and the Indians on the mainland. The relationship the Eastern Shore Indians developed with colonists was beneficial for them initially, but it became unattractive. They were in a "no war" situation because they would lose their independence if they continued to ally themselves with the Powhatans, but their alliance with colonists on the peninsula also resulted in their loss of independence.

PREFACE

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is my home, and I have always been intrigued by its history. My initial interest in this project, however, began with a research paper I wrote about white, black and Indian labor on the Eastern Shore in the seventeenth century. That research sparked my interest in the Eastern Shore's Indian population because I sensed that I had barely scratched the surface of the material. I wanted to learn more, and one of my professors suggested that an honors thesis would give me the opportunity to do more independent research while providing a unique capstone experience for my history major.

My work parallels that of historian Helen C. Rountree who closely examined the Eastern Shore Indians in Powhatan Foreign Relations, 1500 – 1722; Pocahontas's People; The Powhatan Indians of Virginia; and Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland which she co-authored with Thomas E. Davidson. Rountree argues that the Eastern Shore Indians were part of the Powhatan chiefdom, but a separate and distinct group.

I do not believe my conclusions are dramatically different from those of Rountree and other historians because most agree that the Accomacs and Occohannocks were a separate entity. I believe that I have examined the Accomacs and Occohannocks more thoroughly, and specifically their interaction with both the colonists on the peninsula and the Indians on the mainland. The relationship the Eastern Shore Indians developed with colonists was beneficial for them initially, but it became destructive. They were in a “no-win” situation because they would lose their independence if they continued to ally themselves with the Powhatans, but their alliance with colonists on the peninsula also resulted in their loss of independence.

If I had more time and more readily available resources, I would like to compare the Eastern Shore Indians with other Indian groups living along the East Coast, and perhaps Latin America, to determine if the colonial experiences of the Accomacs and Occohannocks were truly unique.

In 1607, Powhatan's chiefdom contained approximately 13,000 people from thirty-one tribes. They lived on slightly less than 6,500 square miles of Virginia coast. Powhatan had inherited six of the tribes in the mid to late sixteenth century and gained the rest through warfare or the threat of it in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It is unclear how the Accomacs and Occohannocks became part of the Powhatan chiefdom.

Common beliefs, customs, and social organizations define an Indian tribe. The Accomacs and Occohannocks shared many cultural similarities with the Powhatan on the mainland, but because tribes share some traits in common, it is difficult to identify

1. Helen C. Rountree, and E. Randolph Turner III, "On the Frontier of the Northeast: The Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom in Virginia" in *The Forgotten Confederates: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521-1704*, Charles Hudson and Catherine Chavis Fessenden, eds. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), 159; Helen C. Rountree, ed., *Problems of Foreign Relations, 1500-1722* (Baltimore: The University Press of Virginia, 1973), 76, 78.

INTRODUCTION

Indians on the Eastern Shore of Virginia were a part of the larger Powhatan chiefdom, but they were also a separate entity with unique traits, characteristics, and cultural and historical developments. Separation from the chiefdom created stronger advantages than disadvantages. The English neither wanted nor attempted to coexist with the Indians, but they lived in a more peaceful society on the Eastern Shore than did colonists and Indians on the mainland. The relationship was beneficial for the Accomacs and Occohannocks in the early colonial period, but slowly deteriorated as the colonial period progressed, and ultimately became destructive and led to their loss of political autonomy in the early nineteenth century.

In 1606 Powhatan's chiefdom contained approximately 13,000 people from thirty-one tribes. They lived on slightly less than 6,500 square miles of Virginia coast. Powhatan had inherited six of the tribes in the mid to late sixteenth century and gained the rest through warfare or the threat of it in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It is unclear how the Accomacs and Occohannocks became part of the Powhatan chiefdom.¹

Common beliefs, customs and social organizations define an Indian tribe. The Accomacs and Occohannocks shared many cultural similarities with the Powhatans on the mainland, but because tribes share some traits in common does not signify a total identity

¹ Helen C. Rountree, and E. Randolph Turner III, "On the Fringe of the Southeast: The Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom in Virginia" In The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521-1704, Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser, eds., (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), 359; Helen C. Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 1500 – 1722 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 76, 78.

of cultures among them.² The culture and civilization of the Eastern Shore Indians corresponded closely with the Powhatans, but they were a separate entity.

Indians of the Chesapeake Bay area had numerous contacts with Europeans before the first permanent English settlement in Jamestown. The Eastern Shore Indians may have seen Giovanni da Verrazano who sailed past the Chesapeake Bay in 1524. According to French and English accounts, in 1546 a young Englishman traded with Indians from a ship near the bay. He recalled that "over thirty canoes in each of which were fifteen to twenty persons" came to trade. The Indians' eagerness to trade may indicate that they had seen Europeans before. The first European effort at settlement in the region was by the Spanish who tried, but failed, to establish a mission and brought Spanish Jesuit missionaries into the lower bay between 1570 and 1572. The Accomacs and Occohannocks probably would have heard about the Spanish missions through the "moccasin telegraph."³

The English attempted to establish a colony on Roanoke Island. They landed on July 4, 1584, but stayed only one month. In April of 1585, at least seven ships returned with approximately 600 men, about half of whom remained. Some of them ventured north, met the Chesapeake Indians, and developed friendly relations with them. It is likely that the Eastern Shore Indians would have heard about these encounters on the mainland. The Roanoke settlers had heard about other Indian groups including the Accomacs on the

² Helen C. Rountree and Thomas E. Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 26; Frederic W. Gleach, Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures (Lincoln, Ne: The University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 17; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 137.

³ Gleach, Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia, 99, 89; Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 47-8.

Eastern Shore, or the “Comboc,” probably the Spanish interpretation of their name, and the Mashawatoc, who were probably the Nassawaddox Indians, a subtribe of the Accomacs.⁴

Approximately 6000 colonists arrived in Virginia between 1607 and 1624, an influx which helped the colony survive. There was continuous interaction between the English and Indians from the time of first settlement. The English, who had known about the Indians since the early sixteenth century, had an explicit plan for subjugating them. Colonists came with the idea that the Indians would be non-Christian and uncivilized, which helped rationalize their plans for exploitation and conquest. The Virginia Company, however, did not want to offend the Indians any more than necessary because they understood that the Indians could be beneficial to the success of the settlement. The London Council advised the colonists that “In all Your Passages you must have Great Care not to Offend the naturals if You Can Eschew it and imploy Some few of your Company to trade with them for Corn and all Other lasting Victuals.”⁵

⁴ Gleach, Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia, 99-101; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 2.

⁵ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640 (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), 19; Gary B. Nash, Red, White and Black: The Peoples of Early America (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), 52, 55; Bernard W. Sheehan, Savagism and Civility: Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 7; Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1978), 18, 118, 119; Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 76; Anonymous, “The London Council’s ‘Instructions given by way of Advice’” [1606] In The Jamestown Voyages Under the First Charter, 1606 – 1609, Philip L. Barbour, ed., (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1969), 51.

Geographic Separation

The Chesapeake Bay separated Indians on the mainland from those on the Eastern Shore of Virginia physically, politically, and culturally. The Accomacs were the main Indian group on the Eastern Shore, and the Occohannocks a subchiefdom of this larger group. Accomac means “across the water,” indicating that they defined themselves in relation to the mainland and their distance from it. Esmy Shichans, the chief or werowance of the Accomacs, also known as the Laughing King, gave his brother Kiptopeke control of the northern region and its people, the Occohannocks. The Eastern Shore Indians had a well-established leadership system and structured society independent of Powhatan, the paramount chief of the approximately 13,000 Indians in Virginia’s Tidewater region. Without the geographic separation of the Chesapeake Bay, the Eastern Shore Indians may not have developed as a strong, independent people.⁶

The Indians on the Eastern Shore of Virginia were part of the Powhatan chiefdom, identified with them, had cultural similarities and spoke their language. Their east-west orientation was a logical development of the region’s geography, and language reinforced their connection. Captain John Smith, who led the colonists’ first expedition to the peninsula, noted when he visited the Eastern Shore in 1608 that the Indians “spake the language of Powhatan wherein they made such descriptions of the bay, Iles, and rivers.” Indians on the Eastern Shore formally recognized Powhatan as their king. Smith noted that “they on the river of Acohanock with 40 men, and they of Accomack 80 men doth

⁶ Helen C. Rountree, The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 9, 118; Rountree, and Turner, “On the Fringe of the Southeast,” 359.

equalize any of the Territories of Powhatan & speake his language, who over all those doth rule as king.”⁷

Though geographically separate, the Accomacs and Occohannocks maintained strong ties to Indians on the mainland and paid tribute to Powhatan. Secretary of Virginia William Strachey noted that a tribe’s werowance traditionally paid “8 parts of 10 Tribute of all the Commodities which their Country yeildeth.” Whether the Eastern Shore natives sent Powhatan eighty percent of their commodities is uncertain, but they did pay him tribute. Before Smith crossed the Chesapeake Bay, he knew that Powhatan sent canoes “over the Baye, for tribute Beads,” which is arguably the only written evidence of Powhatan’s control over the Eastern Shore. Powhatan commanded an extensive network of exchange and tribute, and the economic relationship of the Eastern Shore with the mainland bound them together despite the geographic barrier of the Chesapeake Bay. The distance meant that Powhatan had little ability to collect tribute by force, and the Eastern Shore Indians probably paid their tribute voluntarily because the relationship benefited them economically. It remains unclear what the Accomacs and Occohannocks received in return for their tribute, but the Powhatans had access to a large number of products and resources not available on the Eastern Shore.⁸

The Eastern Shore Indians paid tribute in beads of wampumpeak, known as peak, the purple part of the clamshell, or in beads made from whelk shells. The Accomacs and Occohannocks were two of only eight tribes in the Powhatan chiefdom that had access to

⁷ Captain John Smith, “A Map of Virginia” [1612] In The Jamestown Voyages Under the First Charter, 1606 – 1609, Philip L. Barbour, ed., (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1969), 400, 344.

⁸ Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 45; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 152-3.

large quantities of whelk shells, a commodity that was in high demand on the mainland. Powhatan's desire to control the supply of whelk shells led to his interest in the Eastern Shore. Ownership of rare beads, like those made from whelk, reinforced Powhatan's power as a leader. The Powhatans believed that shell beads made by coastal Indians had a mythic origin because they came from the "outside" and had more appeal.⁹

Geography prevented the development of stronger economic and political ties between the Eastern Shore and the mainland Indians. The width of the bay, almost twenty miles, made communication between the groups difficult. Crossing the bay in open canoes was slow and dangerous, and trips between the shores were few. The Eastern Shore Indians must have submitted voluntarily to Powhatan's leadership because he could not exert force on the Accomacs and Occohannocks from such a distance. The loyalty of the Eastern Shore Indians to the Powhatan chiefdom, therefore, was less intense than the mainland tribes' loyalty.¹⁰

Colonists recognized the Accomacs' and Occohannocks' political independence from Powhatan soon after their arrival. The Powhatans did not share the Europeans' understanding of political loyalty. The Eastern Shore Indians, not inherently loyal to Powhatan, could sever their ties without creating major disruptions in their daily lives or in the Powhatan chiefdom as a whole. After the English arrived, Powhatan's authority as

⁹ Stephen R. Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac" In Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Southeast, Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waslekov, and M. Thomas Hatley, eds., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 153; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 144, 146; Rountree, The Powhatan Indians of Virginia, 56; Gleach, Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia, 58.

¹⁰ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 3.

paramount chief decreased in fringe areas like the Eastern Shore and the Potomac River region. The distance between Powhatan and the fringe areas was so great that he could not overcome English influence. The support of the English appealed to the Accomacs and Occohannocks when they realized that the English were not leaving the area.¹¹

Because they were on the geographic and political fringe of the Powhatan chiefdom, the Accomacs and Occohannocks possessed distinct advantages. They had the ability to act independently. Powhatan's power was greatest over the James, York and Chickahominy chiefdoms. The Accomacs and Occohannocks, as well as tribes on the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers, lived in areas of the chiefdom where he was weaker. Powhatan did not expect as much from his subjects as England did from its, and Indians had more individual freedoms than the colonists. The fringe tribes increased their autonomy from Powhatan as they became more closely connected with the English, though, ironically, their alliance with the English also caused them to lose their autonomy. The English influence on the perimeter of the chiefdom allowed the fringe tribes to detach themselves from the chiefdom. As the English presence grew, the majority of Indians living on the fringe began to adopt English culture. Indians living in fringe societies moved between Indian and English territory. Some left their tribes entirely and assimilated into English culture. Most Indians on the Eastern Shore shifted back and forth between their tribes and the English, living comfortably in both worlds.¹²

¹¹ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 11; William W. Fitzhugh, ed., Cultures in Contact: The Impact of European Contacts on Native American Cultural Institutions, A.D. 1000-1800 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 215, 266.

¹² Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 179; Gleach, Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia, 177; Helen C. Rountree, Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan

The English did not understand the limitations of Powhatan's control over his chieftdom. They thought they faced a replica of their own governmental structure and expected Powhatan to exert more control over the Accomacs and Occohannocks than he did. The English commonly saw leaders only on state occasions when their power seemed greater than it actually was. The reality was that Indian leaders were chiefs, not kings. An Indian leader's relationship with his subjects was less formal than a king's relationship with his subjects. All Indians addressed their leaders by their personal names. Chiefs' orders consisted of matters directly concerning chiefs themselves, like visitor hospitality, warfare, and offenses against them personally, but they had little power over disputes between their subjects. Indian tradition required that chiefs consult with a committee of priests and warriors before giving orders, particularly military orders. A leader could be important in name but have little control over his subjects' daily lives. The English believed Indian chiefs should control the reaction of their subjects to outsiders. Powhatan told settlers at Jamestown that he could not prevent the Indians from shooting at them, and condemned them as his "worst and unruly people." The colonists thought he was lying. The Europeans assumed that Powhatan could control his people's treatment of them, but they were wrong.¹³

Tsenacommacah, which means "densely inhabited land," the name of the paramount Powhatan chieftdom, was a group of chieftdoms controlled by a superior chief. Smaller groups, each with its own district chief who governed a group of villages or

Indians of Virginia Through Four Centuries (Norman, Ok.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 11, 66, 272.

¹³ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 2, 7-8, 12; Gleach, Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia, 25, 26, 29; Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 43-4.

communities, made up this larger configuration. Powhatan was the chief of Tsenacommacah, and Esmé Shichans the chief of the Eastern Shore when the English arrived in 1607. Tsenacommacah was a complex organization with a large number of districts that varied in status. Powhatan could issue commands but not enforce them effectively. The powers of chiefs in such complex societies were limited because they had no real government, no bureaucracy and no standing army to enforce their wishes. Chiefs held a majority of force, but not a monopoly, and their Indian subjects enjoyed extensive freedom. Chiefs like Laughing King had more control over their communities than comparable chiefs on the mainland. Laughing King could deal with local issues and retain considerable autonomy from Powhatan's control. The English did not fully understand Powhatan's lack of central control or realize that it benefited Indians on the Eastern Shore because it allowed them more freedom and made their harmonious relationship with the English possible.¹⁴

The need for defense against enemies, whether Siouan, Iroquoian, or European, held the Powhatan chiefdom together. The Accomacs and Occohannocks did not have established enemies, and because they did not depend on this system of defense as tribes on the mainland did, they were free to develop stronger relationships with the English. Groups that lived on the fringe, like the Accomacs and Occohannocks, traditionally belonged to two or more ethnic groups and had loyalties to both. The Eastern Shore Indians developed a close relationship with the English and identified more with the colonists than did their counterparts on the mainland. Their partial independence gave

¹⁴ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 13, 14, 18; Fitzhugh, ed., Cultures in Contact, 236; Rountree, The Powhatan Indians of Virginia, 141.

them more freedom than the Powhatans on the mainland, but they remained part of the Powhatan chiefdom, at least in the early years of English settlement.¹⁵

The Eastern Shore's geographic separation from the mainland led to cultural differences between the Accomacs and Occohannocks and the Indians on mainland Virginia. The Eastern Shore Indians did not practice the traditional huskanaw, an endurance test that lasted for months and marked the time when young boys became men. After the completion of the huskanaw, Indians believed that their sons were adults and able to hunt. Hunting was not as prevalent on the Eastern Shore as it was on the mainland because the deer population was smaller, and the animals they hunted were smaller and less dangerous. They also took fewer overnight trips than their counterparts on the mainland and had less need for a ritual that focused on men's ability to hunt. The Accomacs and Occohannocks relied more heavily on fishing, fowling, and raising crops than they did on hunting. The huskanaw also developed in war-like societies to prepare young men for warfare. The Indians on the Eastern Shore, isolated from enemies and generally peaceful, had little need to observe a tradition that prepared men for warfare.¹⁶

John Smith commented on the Accomacs' and Occohannocks' unique system of counting, evidence of a cultural difference that developed in an isolated area. They counted with "little sticks," unlike other Indian tribes that used notched sticks, knotted strings, or corn kernels. Smith wrote, "They are the most civill and tractable people we have met with; and by little sticks will keepe just an account of their promises, as by a tally." Other than the exceptions of the huskanaw and the counting system, the cultural

¹⁵ Rountree, Pocahontas's People, 13.

¹⁶ Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, xii, 41; Rountree, The Powhatan Indians of Virginia, 57, 82.

traditions of the Eastern Shore Indians reflected those of Indians on the mainland. Their language, burial practices, kinship systems and authority structures were the same. Both shared the language of the Eastern Algonquian family, traditionally mummified and preserved their chiefs' bodies aboveground and buried common people in graves, lived in a kinship society in which women connected villages by marriage, and followed the chief system of authority, which was passed matrilineally. Though the Accomacs and Occohannocks diverged in minor ways, their cultural similarities made them part of the larger Powhatan chiefdom.¹⁷

The Eastern Shore of Virginia physically adjoins the Eastern Shore of Maryland, but despite this geographic proximity, the Accomacs and Occohannocks identified with the Powhatans and not the Indian groups in Maryland, the Wicomiss, Susquehannocks, Choptanks, Nanticokes, Pocomokes, and Assateagues. The Assawoman and Chincoteague Indians who lived on the border between Virginia and Maryland, appear in the records of Virginia in the late seventeenth century, but were affiliated primarily with the Assateagues. The Accomacs and Occohannocks were more settled and less warlike than the groups to their north. They were more rooted because they lacked access to a sufficient supply of tuckahoe, a tuber-producing plant that grows in freshwater marshes, and had to farm rather than gather their food. Their isolation protected them from attacks and allowed them to be more settled.¹⁸

¹⁷ Rountree, The Powhatan Indians of Virginia, 50; John Smith, "The Generall Historie of Virginia by Captain John Smith, 1624; The Fourth Book" In Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606 – 1625, Lyon Gardiner Tyler, LL.D, ed., (New York : Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1946), 355; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 57, 137, 222.

¹⁸ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 211; Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 15, 32, 93, 205.

Historian Christian Feest identified the Accomacs and Occohannocks with the Indians on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, rather than with the Virginia Algonquians. He grouped the Eastern Shore Indians together because neither practiced the huskanaw, and both engaged in farming more than their mainland counterparts. His grouping ignores the Indians' statements to Smith that they were under Powhatan's leadership. The Indians on Maryland's Eastern Shore focused their attention northward, largely ignoring Virginia's Eastern Shore. That orientation increased the Accomacs' and Occohannocks' isolation and forced them to turn to the Powhatans on Virginia's mainland. The trade carried on by the Accomacs and Occohannocks focused on the west, on their outside relationships with the Powhatans, not on their relationships to the north. By the late seventeenth century the Occohannocks did turn more toward the Maryland tribes because they were being pushed from their land by the English. They began to integrate with Maryland tribes, but their shift was an act of desperation and an effort to retain their identity.¹⁹

Indians on Maryland's Eastern Shore and those on Virginia's Eastern Shore shared an ambiguous relationship of aggression and dependence. On Smith's second voyage to the Eastern Shore, Laughing King told him that Namanicus, chief of the Maryland Indians, would try to lure him to Maryland and cut his throat. In 1663, however, the king of the Pocomokes asked the colonists on the Eastern Shore for help because, he said, his men were trying to poison him and set off a rebellion. The king wanted men and horses from Virginia, and the Virginian government agreed to supply them to let "him know under whose protection he is" so he would "conform only to the

¹⁹ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 5, 211; Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 66.

country to Virginia and not . . . Maryland.” The Pocomokes looked to the colonial government for protection, indicating an amicable relationship with Virginia’s government and the Eastern Shore Indians.²⁰

The Accomacs’ and Occohannocks’ geographic isolation worked largely to their advantage. They had political and social freedoms that Indians on the mainland did not. It did, however, create disadvantages. When they confronted problems with the English, the Eastern Shore Indians had to depend almost entirely upon themselves. They were a part of the larger Powhatan chiefdom, but their tie was not strong and weakened after the arrival of the English. The distance between the shores prevented the Powhatans from coming to the aid of the Accomacs and Occohannocks. Their lack of a close relationship with the Maryland tribes also meant that they had to rely on themselves when they faced conflicts with the English.

The Accomacs and Occohannocks depended on the English for their survival as tribal groups, particularly as the English became stronger in the eighteenth century. In July of 1720, King Tom and his Great Men presented a petition stating that Anthony, an Indian, had poisoned several Indians. The poisoned Indians died, and King Tom and his council condemned Anthony to death. They approached the English court before putting him to death because “fearing to offend the English thereof Most humbly begs ye worships yt you would be pleased to Give your Judgm wheather wee have Liberty to put him ye sd Anthony to death and it may not offend the English.” The court determined that the evidence was not sufficient to prove that Anthony was guilty, and he should not

²⁰ Smith, “The Generall Historie of Virginia,” 354; JoAnn Riley McKey, Accomack County, Virginia Court Order Abstracts, 1663 - 1666, Vol. 1 (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc., 1996), 52.

be put to death. By the eighteenth century, Indians on the Eastern Shore depended on colonists to enforce their laws. They could not afford to “offend the English” because their survival depended on their amicable relationship.²¹

In March of 1624 the Assembly enacted a law “That all trade for corn with the savages, as well public as private, after June next shall be prohibited” because they wanted to control the rampant trading occurring between colonists and Indians. The Assembly did sanction trade with more distant groups. On July 28, 1626, the Assembly granted rights to trade with and entertain Indians to two Eastern Shore colonists when it “ordered that a commission be granted to Captain John Stone to trade with those Indians on the Eastern Shore, which Captain Epps shall inform him to be our friends, either for corn, furs, or any other commodities.” In 1667 the General Assembly passed a law that prohibited colonists from dealing with or entertaining Indians without special permission from the governor. Colonists did not view Indians on the Eastern Shore as a threat, and the governor promptly granted permission to Colonel Edmund Scarborough to trade with and employ Indians.²²

The government allowed both Indians and colonists on the Eastern Shore considerable legal freedom. In November of 1672, the governor sent a letter to the Eastern Shore courts describing a complaint from Johnson, king of the Eastern Shore Indians. The towns under Johnson’s leadership had rebelled and refused to pay tribute to

²¹ JoAnn Riley McKey, Accomack County, Virginia Court Order Abstracts, 1719 - 1724, Vol. 14 (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc., 2001), 46-7.

²² JoAnn Riley McKey, Accomack County, Virginia Court Order Abstracts, 1666 - 1670, Vol. 2 (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc., 1996), 42; Gleach, Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia, 163-4, 165.

him or to the governor. The governor ordered that Johnson and the Indians settle the matter by their own devices.²³

After the Eastern Shore Indians severed their ties from the Powhatans, they looked to the English for protection. From the start the English desired to develop amicable relations with Indians who lived far from Jamestown. Secretary of Virginia William Strachey wrote to Sir Thomas Gates in 1609, "Yf you make freindship with any of these nations, as you must doe, Choose to doe it with those that are farthest from you . . . for you shall haue least occasion to haue differences with them." Smith noted that "There may be on this shoe [*sic*] about two thousand people: they on the West would invade them, but that they want Boats to crosse the Bay; and so would divers other Nations, were they not protected by us." By the early 1620s the Accomacs' and Occohannocks' strongest ties were with the English. The promise of English protection was greater than the threat of Powhatan, and his successor, Opechancanough. Smith warned that the Powhatans would attack the Accomacs and Occohannocks if they had the strength. Severing their ties with the mainland natives fostered a hostile relationship between the Indian groups.²⁴

The Powhatan chiefdom began to decline soon after the English arrived. The English turned to tobacco, a cash crop that required a large amount of land, which they took from the Indians. On the Eastern Shore the land was not as suitable for tobacco, and

²³ JoAnn Riley McKey, Accomack County, Virginia Court Order Abstracts, 1671 - 1673, Vol. 3 (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc., 1996), 96.

²⁴ William Strachey, "Instructions to Sir Thomas Gates" [1609] In The Jamestown Voyages Under the First Charter, 1606 - 1609, Philip L. Barbour, ed., (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1969), 266; John Smith, "The Generall Historie," 355; Fitzhugh, ed., Cultures in Contact, 215.

the colonists did not grow it as widely. The colonists' initial reluctance to settle on the Eastern Shore may have been one reason that relationships between colonists and natives were good. Virginia's growth was an advantage to the Accomacs and Occohannocks initially, and they increasingly began to focus their attention on the colonists on the Eastern Shore. The English gained strength, and the separation between the core of the chiefdom and the outlying areas increased. The colony continued to grow steadily, and it became harder for the Virginia Company to control areas like the Eastern Shore, the colonists' interactions with the Indians, and the Indians' daily lives.²⁵

The Eastern Shore's geographic location influenced the Accomacs' and Occohannocks' acceptance of the English. Indians on the mainland were closer to other Indians on whom they could depend, and had larger numbers with which to defend themselves from the English. By 1621 the Eastern Shore Indians had accepted the English, and by 1640 they had sold most of their land to them. The Accomacs and Occohannocks did, however, maintain many of their own ways.²⁶ Culturally and politically, the Accomacs and Occohannocks belonged to the Powhatan chiefdom, but their geographic separation led them to develop as a separate entity. As the English became stronger, the Accomacs and Occohannocks further severed their ties with the Powhatan chiefdom. Independence benefited the Eastern Shore Indians initially because it strengthened their relationship with the English, the group gaining control.

²⁵ Rountree and Turner, "On the Fringe of the Southeast," 355; Rountree, Powhatan Foreign Relations, 4; J. Leitch Wright, Jr., The Only Land They Knew: The Tragic Story of the American Indians in the Old South (New York: The Free Press, 1981), 74.

²⁶ Rountree and Turner, "On the Fringe of the Southeast," 366.

Relationships between Indians and Colonists

Good relations developed between colonists and Indians on the Eastern Shore because geographic separation isolated the Eastern Shore tribes from the Powhatans. The Powhatans developed antagonistic relationships with colonists. Wars, minor skirmishes, and disputes tainted their experience from the beginning. The Accomacs' and Occohannocks' peaceful association with the English was to the Indians' benefit in the early colonial period and helped them to survive. As the colonial period progressed, however, their relationship deteriorated, and by the early nineteenth century the colonists on the Eastern Shore forced the remaining Indians off their land.

John Smith first explored the Eastern Shore in 1608. The English had little interaction with Indians on the peninsula until 1612 when they began fishing near the southern end. In 1613 Samuel Argall, a merchant, began exploring more of the peninsula and recognized its economic importance for the Powhatans and other Indian groups. On May 1, 1613, Argall left the mainland "to discover the East side of our Bay which [he] found to have many small rivers in it and very good harbors for boats and barges, but not for ships of any good burden." He encountered "a great store of inhabitants" and found that the Accomacs and Occohannocks had a "great store" of corn and were willing to trade. He noted that they were friendly to the English because they had received "good reports" about them from Indians on the mainland with whom they traded, particularly the Patawomecks. Argall tried to cultivate stronger ties between colonists on the

mainland and Indians on the Eastern Shore, which led to the colonization of the peninsula.²⁷

By 1616 colonists had established a salt works on Smith Island at the southern end of the peninsula. By 1619 the salt works, an economic experiment initiated by Governor Thomas Dale to solve the financial problems of the Virginia Company and to develop their resources, failed. Dale bought the southern end of the Eastern Shore, the area “upon the sea, neere unto Cape Charles,” from the Indians, though it is unknown how he paid for it, and called it “Dale’s Gift.” It was a continuation of the “Company’s Garden,” a plantation on the Eastern Shore also used by colonial officials to help meet the Virginia Company’s financial needs. Dale encouraged colonists to establish relationships with Indians and begin regular trading with them. The failure of the salt works did not discourage settlement on the Eastern Shore, and colonists, aided by the Indians, continued to settle there. “Dale’s Gift” was successful, and colonial officials recognized the peninsula’s economic importance.²⁸

The English continued to migrate to North America and, in accordance with the 1618 headright system, claimed land, often on the Eastern Shore. In May of 1620 Dale’s widow requested a patent and received 3,000 acres on the peninsula. Thomas Savage and Sir George Yeardley also received tracts of land from the Laughing King, both of which ran from the bayside to the seaside. Colonists took out the first patents for land on the Eastern Shore on Old Plantation Creek in 1626. Before 1626 colonists had obtained land

²⁷ Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 50; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 150; Susie M. Ames, The Company’s Garden: Dale’s Gift (Eastville, Va: Hickory House for The Eastern Shore of Virginia Historical Society, 1998), 4.

²⁸ Ames, The Company’s Garden, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11.

on the Eastern Shore through agreements with Laughing King, but without official patents.²⁹

The English and Indian understandings of land ownership differed, which affected their relationship and perception of property rights. The Indians' definition of land use was flexible and changed in relation to ecological use. They "owned" only what they found on the land, not the land itself. Indians did not prevent other villagers from hunting or gathering on their land because they all had a mutual right to use the land for these purposes. The English understanding was more about the private rights of the individual rather than the public rights of the community. The English saw landed property as fixed with arbitrary, established boundaries. Indians saw property rights in terms of seasonal sharing of land, whereas colonists understood the land to be their own.³⁰

From their first encounter, Indian leaders on the Eastern Shore promoted friendly relations with the English. Esmy Shichans, the "Laughing King of Accomack" as John Pory called him in 1621, was the werowance of the Eastern Shore Indians, and his brother Kiptopeke ruled Occohannock as his "lieutenant." Smith, recounting his first trip to the Eastern Shore, noted, "the first people we saw were 2 grimme and stout Salvages vpon [*sic*] Cape-Charles . . . they in time seemed very kinde [*sic*], and directed vs [*sic*] to Acawmacks the habitation of the Werowans where we were kindly intreated; this king [Laughing King] was the comliest proper civill Salvage wee incountered." Comparing them with the Powhatans and his more traumatic experiences on the mainland, Smith

²⁹ Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 50, 52.

³⁰ William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 63, 65, 74, 75.

called the Indians on the Eastern Shore “the most civill and tractable people we have met with.” George Percy, an Englishman who visited the mainland, wrote that “the Salvages [were] still contineweinge their mallice Ageinste us.” Colonist Ralph Hamor recounted an incident on the mainland in which Indians shot arrows at the colonists as they approached the shore. The colonists retaliated by burning and pillaging the Indians’ houses, explaining their actions by saying “that though we came to them in peaceable manner, and would have beene glad to have received our demaunds [*sic*] with love and peace, yet we had hearts and power to take revenge and punish where wrongs shold [*sic*] be offered.”³¹

By 1640 the base of the paramount chiefdom on the Eastern Shore had shifted north to Occohannock. Wackawamp, chief of the Onancocks, a tribe of the Occohannocks, became paramount chief after 1643. Wackawamp died in 1657, and Taptaiapon, also identified as Debbedeavon, succeeded him. Debbedeavon has been alternately identified as both Laughing King and Taptaiapon. Rountree and Davidson noted that in 1640 Taptaiapon, or Debbedeayon, was the chief of the Nassawaddoxs, and became paramount chief after Wackawamp. Court records mention “Debbedeaven, King of Nandue” in 1648 and “Deabedanba, Kinge of great nusangs” in 1657, and last mention Laughing King in 1637. Historian Susie Ames identified Laughing King as Debbedeavon, though evidence does not seem to support this conclusion. Laughing King,

³¹ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 179; Smith, “A Map of Virginia,” 400; Smith, “The Generall Historie of Virginia,” 355; George Percy, “A Trewe Relacyon’: Virginia from 1609 to 1612” *Tyler’s Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 3 (1921-1922), 273; Ralph Hamor, A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia, London, 1615, Reprint (Richmond: The Virginia State Library, 1957), 8.

Wackawamp, and Taptaiapon remained friendly to the colonists, helped preserve the relationship between the two cultures and ensured that they lived in peace.³²

Indians on the mainland fought with colonists from the time of the first permanent settlement in 1607. The “starving winter” of 1609 and 1610 strained their relationship because colonists lacked the means by which to nourish themselves and needed Indians’ help to acquire food. The two groups distrusted each other. Indians gave the English food, but as the colonist Emanuel van Meteren noted in 1610, when the Indians saw “that the English were beginning to multiply, [the Indians] were determined to starve them and drive them out.” Animosity grew and in December of 1611, after having survived the “starving winter,” the English attacked Indians on the mainland, taking the town of Appamattuck. By 1613, the English viewed only a few Indian groups, including the Accomacs and Occohannocks, as friendly because most tribes on the mainland carried out raids against them. Indians living farther from Jamestown, such as the Accomacs and Occohannocks, chose to ally themselves with the English and trade with them. Indians living closer to Jamestown became more frustrated with the English and refused to develop extensive trade relationships.³³

³² Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 31, 55, 56, 58; Rountree, Pocahontas’s People, 125-6; Dr. Howard Mackey and Marlene Alma Hinkley Groves, CG, eds., Northampton County Virginia Record Book: Orders, Deeds, Wills &c, Volume 3, 1645 – 1651 (Rockport, Me.: Picton Press, 2000), 254; Ralph T. Whitelaw, Virginia’s Eastern Shore: A History of Northampton and Accomack Counties Vol. 2 (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1951), 699; Susie M. Ames, A Calendar of the Early History of Virginia’s Eastern Shore (Eastville, Va: The Eastern Shore of Virginia Historical Society, 1959), 2.

³³ Emanuel van Meteren, “Commentarien Ofte Memorien” [1610] In The Jamestown Voyages Under the First Charter, 1606 – 1609, Philip L. Barbour, ed., (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1969), 276; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 150; Rountree, Pocahontas’s People, 58; Smith, “A Map of Virginia,” 354.

The Accomacs and Occohannocks, not involved in the early conflicts on the mainland, accepted the colonists willingly when they settled on the Eastern Shore in 1614. The English had begun to adapt to life with Indians on the mainland, and brought this experience to their settlements on the Eastern Shore. The amicable relationship between Indians and colonists on the Eastern Shore continued for much of the seventeenth century. In 1650 Governor William Berkeley wrote to the Northampton County Court that “the Laughinge Kings Indyan[s]” were always friendly to the colonists and ordered the colonists not to bother them.³⁴

Indians on the Eastern Shore had extensive trading networks with the English that were profitable for both groups. The English, after learning that the Accomacs and Occohannocks had received “good reports” about them, began to compete with the Powhatans for the trade of the Eastern Shore Indians. For most of the seventeenth century the Eastern Shore was on the periphery of English settlement, but a lucrative trading location. To the English, one of the main benefits of the Eastern Shore tribes was their access to valuable goods, primarily shell beads. The estates of colonists on the Eastern Shore included roanoke, peak and green beads. The English saw the Accomacs and Occohannocks as trading partners, not as enemies. Their initial goal in dealing with the Accomacs and Occohannocks was not to acquire their land, but rather to make themselves the Eastern Shore Indians’ sole trading partner.³⁵

³⁴ Rountree, Pocahontas’s People, 124.

³⁵ Gleach, Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia, 164; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 150, 152; Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 56.

The Accomacs' and Occohannocks' surpluses of corn first attracted colonists to develop trade relationships with them. In the early years of settlement, the English depended on Indians for food, and needed the corn that Eastern Shore Indians could provide. Smith noted, "Those are the best husbands of any Salvages we know: for they provide Corne to serve them all the yeare, yet spare; and the other not for halfe the year, yet want." The colonists were grateful that the Indians on the Eastern Shore had surplus corn which they could purchase, in contrast to the Indians on the mainland who did not produce surplus supplies. Indians on the mainland did share food with colonists occasionally, but Smith was wary. When they provided settlers with corn in the fall of 1607, Smith commented, "It pleased God (in our extremity), to move the Indians to bring us Corne, ere it was halfe ripe, to refresh us, when we rather expected . . . they would destroy us." Smith found it hard to believe that Indians were helping colonists out of genuine concern for them. The English tried to establish an outwardly friendly relationship, but they always anticipated violence. They were less cautious of the Accomacs and Occohannocks, however, because they did not feel that they posed as much of a threat to them as the mainland Indians.³⁶

The English required the Indians to pay tribute, and acknowledged the tribute with gifts to the Indians in return. In May of 1678 Eastern Shore resident John Cole acknowledged that the Indians had received 288 pounds of tobacco from the county after they had brought in their tribute of sixteen gallons of cider. The peaceful relationships on the Eastern Shore also meant that the English could permit members of the Accomac and Occohannock tribes to own guns. In 1652 the English Assembly permitted colonists to

³⁶ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 150; Smith, "The General Historie," 354-5; Nash, Red, White and Black, 56, 42.

confiscate firearms from Indians, and the next year prevented colonists from lending Indians firearms. In 1691, however, John Custis bequeathed “the gun he usually shoots with” to his Indian servant Tom. Colonists on the mainland did not freely share guns with Indians but colonists on the Eastern Shore had no reservations about Indians owning guns, and often ignored laws enacted by the Assembly.³⁷

By 1623 colonists had overcome the Powhatans’ economic influence on the Eastern Shore. The Accomacs’ and Occohannocks’ dependence on the Powhatans shifted to dependence on colonists. The Indians profited from trading with the English, and did not want to jeopardize this relationship. The association also hurt them, however. The English changed the sociopolitical environment so quickly that they overpowered Indian autonomy. In August of 1678 the Court ordered that a “mart or fair for trade with the Indians” be held on September 10 in Onancock. The English traded with the Indians, but it was an unfamiliar trading system for the Indians.³⁸

The economic relationship of colonists and Indians extended beyond trading. Colonists employed Indians as servants and laborers. In 1619 the General Assembly enacted a law acknowledging that Indians were “there to doe service in killing Deere, fishing, beating of Corne and other workes.” In a 1667 deposition John Keeble recounted that an Indian killed four deer for an Englishman, and was to kill three more before he

³⁷ JoAnn Riley McKey, Accomack County, Virginia Court Order Abstracts, 1676 - 1678, Vol. 5 (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc., 1997), 112; James Handley Marshall, Abstracts of the Wills and Administrations of Northampton County, Virginia, 1632 - 1802 (Rockport, Me: Picton Press, 1994), 158; Rountree, Pocahontas’s People, 92.

³⁸ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 150, 153, 187; JoAnn Riley McKey, Accomack County, Virginia Court Order Abstracts, 1678 - 1682, Vol. 6 (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc., 1997), 8.

received a coat in return. In Accomack County wolves, bears, and wildcats killed the livestock of settlers, and in 1669 county officials provided that anyone who killed a predator would receive 200 pounds of tobacco. The county encouraged Indians who killed an animal to present its head and skin, or a certificate describing the kill, to Eastern Shore resident Edmund Scarburgh, who would pay “one matchcoat and three shoots of powder and shot” for each animal.³⁹

The relationship between Indians and colonists allowed some Indians to prosper. In 1698 John Bayly sued Edward Bagwell, an Indian, for 500 pounds of tobacco. When the Court could not locate Bagwell, it granted an attachment against his estate. The Court later listed Bagwell as delinquent in turning in his list of tithables. The Court acquitted him because it found that he was not intentionally trying to defraud the county. Bagwell’s prosperity grew from his business with the colonists. Colonists did not prevent him from acquiring property simply because he was an Indian.⁴⁰

The colonists’ first interest in the Accomacs and Occohannocks was trade, but they soon began to acquire the Indians’ land. As long as the Indians owned the land on which they lived, their culture could thrive. The English population on the Eastern Shore increased and the colonists acquired larger amounts of Indian land. These transfers were peaceful, and colonists compensated the Indians for the land they took, but the loss of land was disadvantageous for the Indians because the English were slowly pushing them

³⁹ Virginia Assembly, “Proceedings of the Virginia Assembly” In Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606 – 1625, Lyon Gardiner Tyler, L.L.D., ed., (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1946), 264; McKey, Accomack County, Vol. 2, 28-9, 164.

⁴⁰ JoAnn Riley McKey, Accomack County, Virginia Court Order Abstracts, 1697 – 1703, Vol. 9 (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc., 1999), 40, 53, 62.

off of their land. The English viewed agricultural land as the Indians' only legitimate property, and took over land the Indians used for hunting and gathering.⁴¹

In 1643 colonists paid to "Wachiwamp Greate King of the Easterne Shoare the quantity of Forty Armes Length of Rooneoake a peece for the quiett and peaceably enjoyeing of their land which they now possesse." Wackawamp respected the English, and in his 1656 will he wrote, "I formerly Sold my Land out of Love and [a]ffection I always did bear to ye English it is my Desire yt they will [co]ntinue their Love to my Said Heirs and yt the[y] live as formerly friends." He requested that his heirs continue to live in peace with the colonists. In contrast, in 1656 the Assembly forbade Powhatans on the mainland to sell land to the English. This law came in the wake of violence and confrontations, and the government feared that if colonists continued to encroach upon the Indians' space, there would be another uprising. Colonists on the Eastern Shore did not share this heightened fear, and Indians on the Eastern Shore continued to sell their land to them.⁴²

Colonists who took the Indians' land, whether they compensated them for it or not, attracted little legal attention. There are records of English compensation for Indian land, but it is unclear how often the English took Indian land without compensating them because these arrangements do not appear in the records. Between 1620 and 1640 the English took over the Accomacs' land on the southern end of the peninsula and the

⁴¹ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 193; Cronon, Changes in the Land, 62, 63.

⁴² Susie M. Ames, County Court Records of Accomack – Northampton, Virginia, 1640 – 1645 (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia for The Virginia Historical Society, 1973), 289; Dr. Howard Mackey and Candy McMahan Perry, eds., Northampton County Virginia Record Book: Deeds, Wills &c, Volume 7, 1657 – 1666 (Rockport, Me.: Picton Press, 2002), 10; Rountree, Pocahontas's People, 92, 124.

Occohannocks' land farther north between 1640 and 1670. In the early 1620s the Accomacs had given up some of their land, but the colonists were still few in number and relations remained friendly. The Accomacs remained a cohesive group even as colonists encroached upon their land. They changed their name to the Gingaskins for undocumented reasons, and continued to live on some of their original territory. The Occohannocks, however, began to ally with Maryland tribes to protect themselves. They had either lost their land to the English or decided to sell their land and move north. The Occohannocks broke away from the English, but the Gingaskins managed to coexist with them into the nineteenth century.⁴³

The amicable relationship between the Accomacs and Occohannocks and the English translated into some legal benefits for the Indians. In 1631 the General Assembly prohibited colonists from "parley[ing]" with the Indians except on the Eastern Shore, where they were allowed to converse with them, "especially the Mattawombes," but not let them into their homes. The Mattawombes, a tribe of the Accomacs, had given up much of their land and moved north to the town bearing their name. Eastern Shore Indians did face governmental restrictions, but the geographic separation and peaceful coexistence in the colonial period allowed comparatively more freedom on the peninsula than on the mainland. The more distant the government body, the more they respected Indians' rights. The government, located in Jamestown, could afford to be more liberal in dealing with Indians on the Eastern Shore. According to Act II of the 1655 General Assembly, residents of Northampton County could adopt their own laws with respect to

⁴³ Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 208, 63, 65, 207; Rountree, Pocahontas's People, 66

Indians on the Eastern Shore as long as the laws were not contrary to the laws of England. The government recognized that colonists on the Eastern Shore had a better relationship with Indians than they did with the Powhatans. This realization worked to the advantage of Eastern Shore Indians because the laws were not as equally enforced on the peninsula as on the mainland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴⁴

English courts recognized Indians' legal rights on the Eastern Shore, and Indians took colonists to court regularly when they felt they had been wronged. These court appearances pertained primarily to disputes over land or vague disputes not clarified by court records because one or both parties did not appear in court. Indians on the Eastern Shore were tried by jury, and many were both taken to court and took others to court. In 1664 John Devorax, an Englishman who worked as an interpreter, stole an Indian's gun. His employer fired him, and the court forbid him to interact with Indians because he had behaved "treacherously amongst the Indians to the abuse of His Majesty's subjects and the dishonour of our nation." Eastern Shore tribes may have had civil rights that equaled those of the English at least until the late seventeenth century. They were participating, however, in a foreign legal system. Because the Accomacs and Occohannocks acted independently of the tribes on the mainland, Eastern Shore residents afforded them rights like trial by jury. By entering into this system, they were independent from the mainland Indians, but they were still losing their independence.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 54; Helen C. Rountree and E. Randolph Turner, III, Before and After Jamestown: Virginia's Powhatans and Their Predecessors (Gainesville, Fl: University Press of Florida, 2002), 167; Jennings Cropper Wise, The Early History of the Eastern Shore of Virginia (Richmond: The Bell Book and Stationary Co., 1911), 153.

⁴⁵ Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 56, 58, 59, 71; McKey, Accomack County, Vol. 1, 97.

The close relationship the Indians shared with colonists meant that they lived in relative peace, but under the control of the English. The English thought they had complete authority. In 1656 John Hammond, a colonist who lived on the mainland, wrote:

By trading with Indians for Skine, Beaver, Furres and other commodities oftentimes good profits are raised; The Indians are in absolute subjection to the English, so that they both pay tribute to them and receive all their severall king [*sic*] from them, and as one dies they repaire to the English for a successor, so that none neede doubt a place of securitie.⁴⁶

As the English became stronger, the Indians' subjugation increased. Robert Beverley wrote his famous history in 1705 when the Indian population on the Eastern Shore had dwindled from more than 2,000 to a few hundred. The Indians, he noted,

Have on several accounts reason to lament the arrival of the *Europeans*, by whose means they seem to have lost their Felicity, as well as their Innocence. The *English* have taken away great part of their Country, and consequently made every thing less plenty amongst them. They have introduc'd Drunkenness and Luxury amongst them.⁴⁷

By the end of the seventeenth century, settlers in Virginia numbered over 60,000, a great increase from the original 104. The Powhatans numbered less than 600. Disease played a large part in this loss of population, as Indians were exposed to diseases to which they had no immunity.⁴⁸ Beverley noted the poor state of the Eastern Shore Indians:

⁴⁶ John Hammond, "Leah and Rachel, or, the Two Fruitfull Sisters Virginia, and Maryland: Their Present Condition, Impartially Stated and Related" In Tracts and Other Papers, Peter Force, ed., London: T. Mabb, 1656, Reprint (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1999), 19-20.

⁴⁷ Robert Beverley, The History and Present State of Virginia, ed., Louis B Wright, 1705, Reprint, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 233.

⁴⁸ David E. Stannard, American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 107.

The *Indians of Virginia* are almost wasted . . . In *Accomack* are 8 Towns: *Matomkin* is much decreased of late by the Small Pox, which was carried thither. *Gingoteque*. The few remains of this Town are joyn'd with a Nation of the *Maryland Indians*. *Kiequotank*, is reduc'd to a very few Men. *Matchopungo*, has a small number yet living. *Occahanock*, has a small number yet living. *Pungoteaque*. Govern'd by a Queen, but a small Nation. *Oanancock*, has but four or five Families. *Chiconessex*, has very few, who just keep the name. *Nanduye*. A Seat of the Empress. Not above 20 Families, but she hath all the Nations of this Shore under Tribute. In *Northampton*. *Gangascoe*, which is almost as numerous as all the foregoing Nations put together.⁴⁹

The English and the Indians of the Eastern Shore did experience conflicts in 1641.

After numerous disagreements over land, the Court set aside 1500 acres for the Gingaskins, their first official designation as the Gingaskins, on Indiantown Creek, but this grant did not eliminate conflicts. In 1641 Philip Taylor, who lived near the Gingaskin reservation, began harassing the Indians because he thought they were infringing upon his land. They complained to the Court which upheld their rights to the land. In January of 1643 Taylor, who had become a justice of the peace and the high sheriff of Northampton County, led an armed force to the Gingaskin town. He refused to forget the earlier conflict and wanted to force the Indians off the land on which they were living. This action aggravated the relationship, and in the spring of 1643 Northampton County ordered the county militia to mobilize to prevent conflict, which they accomplished successfully. The Gingaskins complained again in 1660 about damage to their corn by their English neighbors. In 1667 they testified in Northampton County Court that John Savage and other Englishmen were taking their land. The Court found that most of the land belonged to Savage. Conflicts over land generally ended peacefully, but as the

⁴⁹ Beverley, The History and Present State of Virginia, 232.

English gained control of the area, they forced the Gingaskins onto increasingly smaller parcels of land.⁵⁰

The original 1500 acres of the Gingaskin reservation came from Thomas Savage's land. The Gingaskins remained on this land, lived in their own town and managed to coexist with the English until 1813. Disputes continued between the colonists and Indians, however, as the Gingaskins' land decreased. In 1673, after a dispute with a man named Harmanson, the Court allotted 650 acres to the Gingaskins, fifty acres for each of their thirteen bowmen, men of prime hunting age. In 1769 the Virginia Assembly received a petition from either the Gingaskins or the parish churchwardens, and allowed the wardens to lease two hundred acres of the Indians' land to support them. In the end the churchwardens decided to lease only one hundred acres because rent from this land provided sufficient support.⁵¹

Other disagreements between Indians and colonists related to guns, employment, livestock running loose, debts, trespasses, burning of Indian cabins, hunting, and assaults. In 1650 Wackawamp brought a complaint against Richard Hill, an Englishman who had threatened him:

Whereas Wathiwamp (the same name as Okiawampe and Wachiwampe) Kinge of the Occahannocks Indyans, he sent his complt to this Cort that Richard Hill, Overseer unto Mr. Edm. Scarborough . . . has lately presented a gun at the breast of the Sd Kinge of Occahannoche, whereby he was disturbed in his hunting, Upon consideration of ye badd Consequences wch maye ensue upon such unadvised p'actices, it is thought fitt & ordered that for future tyme noe Englishman shall

⁵⁰ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 193; Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 54, 55, 63-4; McKey, Accomack County, Vol. 3, 31.

⁵¹ Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 54; Rountree, Pocahontas's People, 134, 162-3.

disturb, molest, or act anything ag'st the sd Indyan Kinge to hindr him in his huntinge, as they will answer the same.⁵²

In 1671 William Marshall accused two Indians, John the Bowlmaker and Jack of Morocco, of physical abuse after they seized him "by the hair of the head and drew blood from him." John received sixty lashes and Jack thirty.⁵³

The Gingaskins' alliance with the colonists ended officially in 1813 when they became the first tribe in the United States to be formally dissolved. Their relationship with the colonists had deteriorated slowly from beneficial to destructive, ultimately ending in their loss of political autonomy. The colonists were no longer willing to recognize the Gingaskins as a tribal entity and dissolved the reservation. They were frustrated with the Gingaskins' refusal to give up their traditional lifestyle fully, their resistance to English neighbors, and their intermarriage with free blacks. Whites also feared the presence of free non-whites. In the seventeenth century, geographic separation had made the development of an amicable relationship between colonists and Indians on the Eastern Shore possible. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in spite of the isolation, colonists on the Eastern Shore became increasingly fearful of an uprising, particularly as the number of free blacks grew and the Gingaskins developed ties with them. By the 1780s Eastern Shore residents wanted to eliminate the Gingaskin reservation both to increase their safety and to satisfy their desire for land. Records pertaining to Indians, plentiful in the seventeenth century, diminish dramatically for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as residents pushed Indians out of the area. Why the residents intensified their interest in the Gingaskins' land is unclear, but it was probably a

⁵² Wise, The Early History of the Eastern Shore of Virginia, 56.

⁵³ Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 72-3.

result of their need for more land. They may have exhausted their existing farmland, the number of settlers was increasing, raising the demand for residential land, and their fear of a free non-white population was increasing.⁵⁴

In January of 1784 white residents asked the General Assembly for the right to lease some of the reservation land and set aside the rest for the Indians, "subject to taxation as other Lands." They argued that there were only "five or six" Indians on the reservation and that they did not use the land because of their "fondness for fishing, fowling + hunting, the natural insolence of their disposition, + their natural disinclination to Agriculture." They charged that the reservation was "an Asylum for free Negroes + other disorderly persons, Who build Hutts theron + pillage + destroy the Timber without controul; to the great Inconvenience of the honest Inhabitants of the Vicinity, who have ever considered it a Den of Thieves + Nuisance to the Neighborhood." Whites believed they owned the land and it was a commodity to be traded, whereas Indians believed that they could use land without owning it.⁵⁵

The Assembly investigated illegal residents on the reservation and agreed to "rent & dispose" of the land, but the reservation continued to exist. Colonists petitioned the Assembly again in October of 1787 asking for the dissolution of the reservation, but without success. By 1812, the Assembly had appointed trustees for the Gingaskins, who convinced the Indians to relinquish the remains of their reservation. The trustees petitioned the Assembly, asking for the right to divide the land among the Indians, who they insisted had turned to farming and were "desirous" of land. The trustees and eleven

⁵⁴ Rountree, Pocahontas's People, 179-80.

⁵⁵ Rountree, Pocahontas's People, 179-80; Cronon, Changes in the Land, 75.

Gingaskins signed the petition, which led to the first allotment of Indian land and the first formal dissolution of a tribe in the United States. Indians gave up their land legally, but still managed to take refuge with residents who held onto their shares. Two-thirds of the Gingaskins remained on their land until 1831, but, shortly after Nat Turner's rebellion, whites forced them off the last of it. Eastern Shore residents were increasingly fearful of an Indian uprising, particularly in cooperation with the peninsula's large free black population. Colonists observed Indians mixing with free blacks, and thought that in an uprising their distance from the mainland would make them more vulnerable. Many Indians continued to live in the area. "Indian Town" appears on a map from 1855 and indicates seven houses at the northern edge of the old reservation, around Indiantown Creek on land undesirable to whites.⁵⁶

Though colonists and Indians had conflicts, their relationship was to the Indians' advantage during the colonial period, and the Accomacs and Occohannocks fared better than did the mainland Indians. The Indians enjoyed peaceful relationships with the English as long as they could because they did not want to fall under the domination of the Powhatans. The Eastern Shore Indians preferred to establish a relationship with the colonists. Their relationship with the English deteriorated, however, as the English presence grew on the peninsula and they took the Indians' land. The Eastern Shore Indians had considerable rights and freedoms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but colonists ended the Gingaskins' tribal rights officially in the nineteenth century. In 1670 the governor issued a warrant for the arrest of Edmund Scarborough, who consistently violated the rights of the Indians, "by Murthering Whipping + burning them, By taking

⁵⁶ Rountree, *Pocahontas's People*, 180, 182, 183, 184.

their children by force from them who are their parents. . .” The Court found Scarborough guilty. The government recognized the Indians’ rights in the seventeenth century and prosecuted men like Scarborough who infringed them, but this recognition did not last.⁵⁷

The English recognized that in the beginning the relationship they shared with the Indians on the Eastern Shore was beneficial to both groups. As colonists continued to appropriate the Indians’ land, this association helped them avoid the conflicts that plagued the mainland. The Occohannocks moved north into Maryland to escape white domination, but the Accomacs continued to live on the Eastern Shore as the Gingaskins in relative peace. The English increasingly constricted the Gingaskins’ lives, but the Indians relied on their relationship with the colonists until the English formally dissolved them as a tribal entity.

⁵⁷ Rountree, Pocahontas’s People, 134.

A Lack of Violence

One of the major characteristics that distinguished the Accomacs and Occohannocks from the Powhatans is that they were non-violent. Eastern Shore Indians rarely engaged in warfare with other Indian groups or with colonists. Their peaceful way of life helped preserve their amicable relationship with colonists on the Eastern Shore into the nineteenth century. They did not participate in the uprisings of 1622 or 1644, both of which the Powhatans on the mainland initiated, or in Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. Their decision to refrain from violence led colonists to trust and develop relationships with them. Colonists tried to distance themselves from associations with Indians on the mainland, particularly after the uprisings. It remains unclear why Indians on the Eastern Shore were non-violent while their counterparts on the mainland regularly engaged in violence, though it was perhaps because the Eastern Shore Indians had no real enemies.

The English observed little violence or warfare among the Powhatan tribes themselves, particularly between the Accomacs and Occohannocks. John Smith, however, thought that all Eastern Shore tribes were somewhat prone to war when he first encountered them. Unlike the Indians of Maryland or the Powhatans on the mainland, the Accomacs and Occohannocks did not live under a constant threat of violence, a condition which may explain their peaceful behavior. Major fighting on the mainland was not frequent, but raids against the English, particularly in the early years of settlement, were common. The separation of the Accomacs and Occohannocks from the Powhatan chiefdom allowed them to distance themselves from the raids and preserve their relationship with the English. Indians traditionally went to war to get revenge or to defend their honor. With the arrival of the English, however, Indians began going to war

for more complicated reasons. They wanted to control trade and acquire hunting land from other tribes. They tried to subjugate other tribes and make them buffers to ward off the English who continued to infringe upon their land, or to get slaves to sell to the English. Many tribes sought to eliminate other tribes that stood in the way of these goals. The Accomacs and Occohannocks did not have any real enemies, got along peacefully with the English, and had no pressing reason to go to war.⁵⁸

After the marriage of Englishman John Rolfe to Pocahontas in 1614, Indians began to understand that English expansion threatened their culture and even their existence. Their options were to remain peaceful, relinquish their land and accept the whites' terms for assimilation, to move west, or to try to eliminate the English. By choosing to give up their land and assimilate to colonial culture, the Accomacs and Occohannocks ensured a peaceful relationship with the English on the Eastern Shore during the uprisings of 1622 and 1644. The Powhatans, in contrast, chose to use force against the English in an attempt to maintain sovereignty. While the Eastern Shore Indians also wished to maintain their sovereignty, they chose to cultivate a relationship with the English rather than with the Powhatans. The Eastern Shore Indians were in a "no-win" situation as either relationship would eventually lead to the loss of autonomy.⁵⁹

Before 1622 colonists often felt secure in their relationship with the Indians. Thomas Savage, an interpreter who lived on the Eastern Shore, heard from Indian friends

⁵⁸ Gleach, Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia, 43; Roger L. Nichols, Indians in the United States and Canada: A Comparative History (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 45; James Axtell, The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 262.

⁵⁹ Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby, and Thad W. Tate, Colonial Virginia: A History (White Plains, NY: KTO Press, 1986), 43.

in 1621 that Opechancanough, paramount chief of the Powhatans, was planning to attack the colonists. Powhatan's brother, Opitchapan, ruled for Powhatan briefly in 1613, but the third brother, Opechancanough, quickly took over the chiefdom and ruled until 1622. Savage informed Governor Francis Wyatt, but Wyatt did not believe him because he thought his relationship with Opechancanough was genuine, and ignored his warning.⁶⁰

The decision of the Accomacs and Occohannocks not to participate in the 1622 uprising marked their first significant break from the Powhatans on the mainland. In the summer of 1621 Opechancanough asked Esmey Shichans for a supply of *Cicuta maculata*, spotted water hemlock, which is widespread on the peninsula, to use in the massacre he planned. The plant, which is related to poison hemlock, is poisonous, and a piece of the root the size of a walnut can be fatal when eaten. The "Kinge of the Eastern shore" refused to supply the poison, evidence that the Eastern Shore Indians were trying to strengthen their ties to the English rather than go to war with them. Esmey Shichans warned the English of the plot "to set upon every plantation of the colony" and forced Opechancanough to delay the attack until 1622. Colonists, both on the mainland and on the Eastern Shore, were grateful to the Eastern Shore Indians when they refused to join the Powhatans and then informed Eastern Shore leaders of the plot. Their actions did strengthen their position as allies of the English. The colonists did not fully trust the Accomacs and Occohannocks, but the Indians' decision to remain on good terms with the English worked in the Indians' favor.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, Indians and English: Facing off in Early America (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 210; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 184; Fitzhugh, ed., Cultures in Contact, 198.

⁶¹ Gleach, Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia, 146, 210; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 47.

The Powhatans attacked on March 22, 1622, and in a few hours killed 347 of 1240 colonists. Smith noted, "The cause of the Massacre was the want of marshall [*sic*] discipline; and because they would have all the English had by destroying those they found so carelessly secure, that they were not provided to defend themselves against any enemy, being so dispersed as they were." Colonists on the mainland thought that they needed to increase military preparedness to control the Indians and maintain peace. In 1620 and 1621 the English increased their attempts to convert Indians to Christianity. Many Indians accepted the Christian God as part of their pantheon but refused to relinquish their religion completely. The English had also expanded into Powhatan territory. The uprising may have been a response to English efforts to convert Indians and an attempt to preserve their culture as the English intruded on it. Colonists on the Eastern Shore were not trying to convert the Accomacs and Occohannocks in the early 1620s, the English presence on the Eastern Shore was not as great as it was on the mainland, and the Eastern Shore Indians had few reasons to rise up against the English.⁶²

The 1622 massacre may not have been an attempt to exterminate the colonists or drive them back to England. The Indians valued the goods the English provided. The Indians may have opposed the English effort to expand their settlements, and tried to confine them to a smaller area. The massacre may have been a sign that the Indians would not voluntarily adapt to English ways, and were determined to remain sovereign.

⁶² W. Stitt Robinson, The Southern Colonial Frontier, 1607-1763 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 28; Smith, "General Historie," 400; Gleach, Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia, 4.

Unlike their counterparts on the mainland, the Accomacs and Occohannocks were more willing to adapt to English ways.⁶³

After the attack in 1622, colonists on the mainland were more hostile to the Powhatans. Everyday life did not change significantly, but many settlers considered the Indians a “cursed . . . nation, vngratefull [*sic*] to all benefits [*sic*].” Edward Waterhouse, a colonist on the mainland, was pleased because now colonists could use violence openly on Indians. He said, “Our hands which before were tied with gentlenesse and faire usage, are now set at liberty by the treacherous violance of the Sausages [Savages] . . . So that we . . . may now by right of Warre, and law of Nations, invade the Country, and destroy them who sought to destroy us . . .” Determined to drive the Indians out, colonists reacted aggressively to the uprising. After the attack Smith wrote, “we would endeavor to inforce the Salvages [*sic*] to leave their Country.” When asked after the massacre, “How the Collony [*sic*] now stands in respect of Savadges [*sic*] ?,” the Assembly replied that Indians had caused no deaths since the uprising, but only “inconveniencies” because of the need to “watch and warde to secure our selves and labors.” Colonists on the Eastern Shore, however, did not try to displace the Accomacs and Occohannocks after the uprising as colonists did on the mainland, and did not have to be on guard at all times as were colonists on the mainland. Colonists on the mainland, however, still depended on trade with Indians and, despite their fears, the 1630’s were peaceful. The English claimed

⁶³ Gleach, Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia, 158; Wesley Frank Craven, White, Red, and Black : The Seventeenth-Century Virginian (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1971), 52.

they wanted to drive the Indians out, but they continued their economic relationship with them because they needed Indian trade goods to survive.⁶⁴

Colonists on the Eastern Shore did have some concerns about the Accomacs and Occohannocks. In 1623, Esmey Shichans sent “20 tubbs of Corne” to the governor, perhaps to strengthen his position as an English ally and dispel colonists’ fears. Colonists on the Eastern Shore continued to trade with and entertain Indians, but they thought of Powhatans as their “irreconcilable [*sic*] enemies.” On February 8, 1628, the Assembly prohibited selling glass bottles to Indians because the Accomacs had been using them to make arrowheads.⁶⁵ Colonists did fear that the insurrection on the mainland in 1622 would recur on the Eastern Shore:

It is ruminated that [the] Indyans (our pretended freinds [*sic*] have an intent to breake the League formrly [*sic*] concluded betweene us. It is therefore ordred that the people the Inhabitanes of this County shall (to the best of their power) stand upon their owne defence . . . And ordrd that any one Comissionr shall have powr to rayse a considerable ptie of able men to goe out amongst the Indyans & make inquire And to give Report to the Court which shall imediatlye bee [*sic*] called That furthr pceedinge may bee (as the occasion shall require).⁶⁶

The First Anglo-Powhatan War occurred between 1609 and 1614 when the English gained control of the James River, and the massacre of 1622 set off the Second Anglo-Powhatan War, which lasted until 1632. The Powhatans undertook their last major

⁶⁴ Gleach, Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia, 167, 5; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 189; Nash, Red, White and Black, 63; Smith, “General Historie,” 373; William S. Powell, John Pory: 1572 – 1636, The Life and Letters of a Man of Many Parts (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 116; Craven, White, Red and Black, 54.

⁶⁵ Rountree, Pocahontas’s People, 80, 81; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 150.

⁶⁶ Susie M. Ames, County Court Records of Accomack – Northampton, Virginia, 1632 – 1640 (Washington, D.C.: The American Historical Association, 1954), 419.

uprising on April 18, 1644, which led to the Third Anglo-Powhatan War that lasted until 1646. The Warrasqueoc tribe attacked colonists living primarily at the fall line and on the south side of the upper James River. They killed approximately 350 English, but did not surprise the colonists as they had in 1622. The Eastern Shore Indians were militarily independent of the Powhatans, but Eastern Shore residents still entertained fears that events on the mainland could occur on the peninsula. The Eastern Shore tribes did not get involved with the Powhatans, though fringe tribes on the Northern Neck did. In 1645, the "Achomack" Indians, probably a reference to the tribe now called the Gingaskins, helped the English in the Third Anglo-Powhatan War by acting as spies.⁶⁷

By the middle of the seventeenth century disease had weakened Indians on both the mainland and the peninsula. The uprisings cost the Indians serious losses, but disease was the main cause for their loss of population. The Powhatans had already lost a large percentage of their population by 1607. Before Europeans arrived, the Powhatan population may have been more than 100,000. By 1607, it was closer to 13,000. European diseases infected the Indian population beginning in the 1570s, and an anonymous correspondent reported that "the great disease reignes in the [native] men generally, full fraught with noodes botches and pulpable appearances in their foreheades." Powhatan claimed in 1608 that he had seen "the death of all my people thrice, and not one living of those 3 generations, but my selfe." Though he probably

⁶⁷ Kevin P. Kelly, "In dispers'd Country Plantation': Settlement Patterns in Seventeenth-Century Surry County, Virginia" In The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo American Society, Thad W. Tate and David L Ammerman, eds., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 195; Frederick J. Fausz, "Fighting "Fire" with Firearms: The Anglo-Powhatan Arms Race in Early Virginia" *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. (1980), 39, 43; Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 194; Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 58.

exaggerated, he was correct that the Powhatan population had been dramatically reduced. The Powhatans on the mainland may have been reacting to the decimation of their population in the uprisings of 1622 and 1644, attempting to reassert some control over their culture. Perhaps the Eastern Shore Indians felt too weakened by disease even to attempt to rise up against the English.⁶⁸

The years between 1622 and 1644, when both colonists and Powhatans battled for control, were crucial for Anglo-Indian relations on the mainland. The uprising of 1622 ended efforts by the English to merge the two societies, create a biracial society, and deal with Indians as friends. It seems unlikely, however, that the English ever seriously entertained the idea of creating a biracial society. They wanted to avoid conflict, but their ethnocentric outlook prevented them from creating an equal society. On the Eastern Shore, Indians and colonists continued to live together peacefully, but colonists did not actively attempt to form an equal society. Because Indian chiefs had very little real power, the Accomacs and Occohannocks were able to remain independent from Indians on the mainland, avoid the 1622 and 1644 massacres, and remain on good terms with the English. Their decision to ally with the English instead of the Powhatans helped them maintain their independence from the mainland Indians, but they lost their sovereignty as English population and power grew. Between 1632 and 1644 English settlement in Virginia expanded, particularly on the Eastern Shore, and all members of the Powhatan chiefdom felt the increased presence. In response, the Powhatans focused on building a

⁶⁸ Stannard, *American Holocaust*, xii, 102, 103, 107.

military organization, but excluded the Eastern Shore Indians. After 1646, the English were in control, and the Powhatans' goal was survival.⁶⁹

The treaty of 1646 which established peace after the 1644 uprising reduced the Indians to a tributary of the colonial government and marked the end of their independence. The treaty provided that the governor of Virginia would choose the "king of the Indians." There is no evidence that colonists on the Eastern Shore immediately applied the provision. Debbedeavon, who became paramount chief after the treaty was signed, does not appear to have been chosen by the governor. In January of 1674, however, Governor William Berkeley proclaimed "that Mary, the daughter of Tabbity Abby, was the lawful queen of all the Indians on the Eastern Shore." He ordered the Northampton and Accomack County Courts "to invest Mary with her just rights and to inform her that all towns under her command were to pay their annual tribute to the governor."⁷⁰ The government allowed Mary to exercise power, but designated her as the leader and required her to pay tribute.

The treaty of 1646 included three main provisions: it allowed the English to erect a defensive barrier on the borders of their settlement, end most contacts with Indians, and subjugate the Indians who lived within or near English settlements. Colonists on the Eastern Shore continued to have contact with Indians, and did not erect a defensive barrier. They may have tried to subjugate Indians living near them, though probably not as severely as did colonists on the mainland. By 1646 the amount of contact between

⁶⁹ Gleach, Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia, 168, 199; Rountree, Powhatan Foreign Relations, 8, 187, 192, 198; Nichols, Indians in the United States and Canada, 54.

⁷⁰ JoAnn Riley McKey, Accomack County, Virginia Court Order Abstracts, 1673 - 1676, Vol. 4 (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc., 1997), 13.

colonists and Indians and the treatment of Indians by colonists varied widely, and the Eastern Shore Indians had more open, friendly contact with colonists than the mainland Indians did.⁷¹

Historian William Fitzhugh argued that by 1646 the Powhatan chiefdom was near collapse. The colonists were “takeing [*sic*] away [Indians’] land and forcing [*sic*] them into such narrow streights and places that they cannot subsist either by planting or hunting and for that it may be feared they may be justly driven to the despaire & to attempt some desperate course for themselves.” This breakdown also occurred on the Eastern Shore, but was not as dramatic because the English did not threaten the Eastern Shore Indians as intensely in the seventeenth century as mainland colonists threatened the Powhatans. Eastern Shore Indians continued to live fairly traditional lives as late as the early eighteenth century, despite their loss of land and population declining.⁷²

In April of 1650 Governor William Berkeley formally recognized the loyalty of the Eastern Shore Indians in the uprising of 1644:

Gentl: Having been frequently informed by testimony of undeniable credit, that the Indians commonly called by the name of the Laughing King Indians, have been most faithful to the English, and especially neither they nor their King in the last bloody massacre could be induced to engage with our enemies against us, & so by consequence kept the remote Indians, at least none broke in at a time when a general combination against us had been ruinous, at least of insupportable expense to us, and considering that we cannot reasonable for the like effect of their friendship, in case we should again need it (which God knows how soon it may be) unless we correspond with them in acts of charity and amity, Especially

⁷¹ Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 1; Craven, White, Red and Black, 56-7; Warren M. Billings, ed., The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606 – 1689 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 210; Nichols, Indians in the United States and Canada, 57.

⁷² Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 198; Fitzhugh, ed., Cultures in Contact, 197; Rountree and Turner, Before and After Jamestown, 175.

unless we abstain from acts of rapine & violence, which they say we begin to do, by taking away their land from them, by pretence of a Sale of a patent. My desire theretofore to you is, and I make it in the name of the peace & safety of the Colony, that you suffer no land to be taken from them but what shall be allowed both in justice & convenience by the full court. And in case the Commissioners disagree in their opinion, that you refer the whole matter to be considered by a full court at James City.⁷³

In April of 1652 the General Assembly commented that "Upon the Desyre of the Inhabitants of Northumberland and Northampton . . . the Commissioners may have power to settle peace with the Indians in their Counties, and to treat with them upon all occasions that Shall happen, for the keepinge of the peace amongst them . . ."⁷⁴

The Indians' political status decreased dramatically between 1646 and 1676. By 1676, their position had evolved from superiority when the colonists first arrived, to equality, to subservience, to dependence. This pattern occurred on both the mainland and the Eastern Shore, but took longer to evolve on the peninsula and allowed the Accomacs' and Occohannocks' culture to endure longer. Eastern Shore colonists continued to push Indians off of their land and asserted their authority over them, but still feared Indian uprisings. Eastern Shore resident Nathaniel Littleton wrote in 1651 to a local commission that was debating war against the Indians, "I pray you be careful not to engage us in war but upon good grounds." In December of 1675 John and Jane Rowles testified that two Indians, Nead and Pawl, "did by words declare that the Indians did conspire against the English and held dangerous plots and conspiracies against his Majesty's subjects of this county in contriving their destruction and could not make their accusation by which they

⁷³ Jennings Cropper Wise, "The Laughing King" In A Scrap Book of Papers (Richmond: The Bell Book and Stationary Co., 1912), 24.

⁷⁴ Warren M. Billings, ed., "Some Acts Not in Hening's Statutes: The Acts of Assembly, April 1652, November 1652, and July 1653" *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 83 (Jan 1975), 71.

declare their own intents.”⁷⁵ Colonists felt threatened, but refrained from attacking the Indians because they had no real cause to declare war.

In 1676 Nathaniel Bacon led a raid against the Indians of mainland Virginia that led to rebellion against the governor. He insisted that the country must defend itself “against all Indians in generall [sic] for that they were all Enemies.” Bacon knew the colonists were frustrated with official colonial Indian policy and Berkeley’s inability to defend the frontier from future Indian attacks. They lived in fear “because of the Susquehannocks who had . . . committed many murders upon them.” The Assembly had determined that the colony would fight a defensive war against the Indians, and would not allow the militia to attack “untill order shall come from the governour.” Bacon recognized the colonists’ anger at this decision. He knew the colonists were dissatisfied with the leadership and wanted to take matters into their own hands and attack and exterminate the Indians. Bacon said, “the whole country is much alarmed with the feare of Generall Combinacion [of the Indians] and I thinke not without reason.”⁷⁶

Colonists on the Eastern Shore were initially indifferent to Bacon’s Rebellion. They had grievances with Indians, but they were minor, and they did not feel the need to take up arms. The Gingaskins and Occohannocks worked for the colonists, drank in white taverns, sued them in white courts, and bargained for room and board in white homes. Most Eastern Shore residents did not want to disrupt this relationship. Eastern Shore

⁷⁵ Nichols, Indians in the United States and Canada, 57, 60; McKey, Accomack County, Vol. 4, 155; Wise, The Early History of the Eastern Shore of Virginia, 120.

⁷⁶ Edmund S. Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 257, 258; Billings, Selby and Tate, Colonial Virginia, 77, 84.

residents Charles Scarburgh and William Kendall were fined for supporting Bacon, but other residents were loyal to the Governor. Some joined the fight because he promised to exempt them from taxation. Colonist Daniel Jenifer remained loyal to Berkeley during the rebellion, and Major General John Custis let the Governor take refuge in his home when Bacon burned Jamestown. Berkeley said of the Eastern Shore, it was a “place I understood continued Loyal (and indeed halfe of it was so).”⁷⁷

Even when Bacon’s Rebellion disrupted the mainland, Indians and colonists on the Eastern Shore continued to interact peacefully with each other, though sometimes with increased fear. On the mainland Bacon’s Rebellion led colonists to attack and kill Indians, and some colonists on the Eastern Shore feared that the Indians would rise up and attack them. Rumors circulated about Indian insurrections on the Eastern Shore after the uprisings of 1622 and 1644, and Bacon’s Rebellion brought a new wave of rumors. Colonists did not find proof of any of the rumors, but their fear troubled interactions with the Indians.⁷⁸ In 1679 the Assembly assured Eastern Shore residents that they had the same rights to protect themselves against the Indians as did mainland residents:

And to the end that the Eastern Shore may not altogether be left without defense against the Indian Enemy, if any shall attempt thereon, or any such attempt shall arise among the inhabitants there; be it enacted . . . that the inhabitants on the Eastern Shore may have . . . the same liberty to make garrisons and raise soldiers in a manner and form as it is allowed to the several counties on the Western Shore, or to raise and employ their soldiers in ranging as they may find occasion.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 255; Wise, The Early History of the Eastern Shore of Virginia, 222; McKey, Accomack County, Vol. 5, vi, *xiii-xiv*; Wilcomb E. Washburn, The Governor and the Rebel: A History of Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 70.

⁷⁸ Craven, White, Red and Black, 63; Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 70.

⁷⁹ Wise, The Early History of the Eastern Shore of Virginia, 226.

The Gingaskins and Occohannocks did not sign either the 1646 treaty or the Treaty of Middle Plantation in 1677 that established peace after Bacon's Rebellion, but colonists treated them as though they had signed. Both treaties promised Indians justice "as though they were Englishmen," but did not protect Indians from English incursions into their land. The Eastern Shore Indians were not particularly affected by violence in 1622 or 1644, or during Bacon's Rebellion. Indians on the mainland feared that they would be punished by the English for raids carried out by "foreign" Indians. The Eastern Shore Indians did not share this fear both because they had not attacked the colonists and because no "foreign" Indians had conducted raids on the English in the area.⁸⁰

The decision of the Eastern Shore Indians not to participate in the uprising of 1622 ended their military association with the Powhatans on the mainland. Their avoidance of violence in 1644 solidified this decision, and the colonists' decision not to join Bacon in fighting the Indians on the Eastern Shore further reinforced the alliance of the Eastern Shore Indians and the colonists.

As colonists claimed Indians' land, forced them onto smaller parcels of land, and recognized fewer Indian rights, their relationship disintegrated, and resulted in the legal dissolution of the Gingaskin reservation in 1813. Their official designation as a tribe ended, but the Indians did not disappear. Instead, they withdrew and white residents increasingly ignored them. The Indians adapted and learned to manipulate the English. They may not have kept their Indian names, but they did keep their traditions. They were

⁸⁰ Rountree and Davidson, Eastern Shore Indians of Virginia and Maryland, 59, 91; Rountree, Pocahontas's People, 134; Christian F. Feest, "Nanticoke and Neighboring Tribes" In Handbook of North American Indians Vol. 15, Bruce G. Trigger, ed., (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 243.

marginalized both economically and socially, but they retained some influence. In April of 1703, Mary, Empress of the Eastern Shore, complained that Anthony West and George Windham had removed goods from the cabin of her son Charlton, who had recently died. The sheriff summoned the men to court. The suit was ultimately dismissed, but Mary defended her son's rights. Indians cultivated relationships with whites who would look out for their interests, and helped them maintain some representation in society, however slight.⁸¹

⁸¹ Kupperman, Indians and English, 239; McKey, Accomack County, Vol. 9, 160; JoAnn Riley McKey, Accomack County, Virginia Court Order Abstracts, 1703 - 1710, Vol. 10 (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc., 2000), *xiv*.

CONCLUSION

The continued growth of the English ultimately overpowered the Indians on the Eastern Shore. The process started later on the peninsula and was less violent than on the mainland, but the result was the same. The English destroyed the Indian tribes and took away their land.⁸² The Eastern Shore Indians' status as an entity separate from the Powhatans on the mainland worked to their advantage in the early colonial period. The Accomacs' and Occohannocks' geographic separation from the Powhatans helped them develop positive relationships with the colonists. Their good relations with the English lasted because they chose to cultivate them rather than surrender their sovereignty to the Powhatans. They would eventually lose their sovereignty either way, and chose the English as the group with whom they would develop the stronger relationship. The amicable relationship between the colonists and Indians prevented the violence on the peninsula that ensued on the mainland. When the English wanted more land, however, the rights and status of the Accomacs, later the Gingaskins, and the Occohannocks deteriorated, and the relationship led to the end of the Gingaskins as a tribe.

⁸² Rountree, ed., Powhatan Foreign Relations, 152.

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- Voyages Under the First Charter, 1606 – 1609, 113. ed. Philip L. Barbour. Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1969.
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