

Virginia Immigration and Migration: Where they came from—where they went

By Carolyn H. Brown

In 1607, Virginia became the first English settlement in the new world to survive beyond just a few years. Though other countries had sent explorers to the Americas, the English established more lasting settlements.

The westward movement did not begin in America itself, rather it was a part of a long historical process which started centuries earlier in England. In England the “betterment migration” was similar to the movement later to and within America. The poor moved more frequently and made longer journeys than the rich. One quarter of England’s vagrants traveled 100 miles or more at a time. Most of the movement led to seaports where they were outward bound to other European countries, the Indies and America.

The first European colonists in America arrived between 1578 and 1625. There were more than thirty English speaking settlements in America during that time. Text books mention Roanoke, Jamestown and Plymouth, however, there were many others. Most were fishing stations and left little traces behind. Both Jamestown and Plymouth settlers discovered traces of Europeans who had been there before them. Sir Walter Raleigh named Virginia in honor of his sovereign Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen.

The first child born in the new world was Virginia Dare, in honor of the place of her birth at Roanoke Island. Though the Roanoke settlement did not survive it set the stage for the Jamestown settlement.

OVER TIME THERE WERE FOUR GREAT AMERICAN MIGRATIONS:

- (1) From elsewhere to America
- (2) From east to west
- (3) From country to city
- (4) From city to suburb

JAMESTOWN

The Jamestown settlement was established on the lower James River in Virginia in one of the most unhealthy areas in the country. It had tidal swamp land all around, and over time many of the settlers died because of the diseases that festered there. In the early years they depended on the local natives for food to help keep them alive. Unfortunately, it was some of the diseases the settlers brought with them that decimated the native population.

WHO WERE THESE SETTLERS?

A large part of the English aristocracy and London merchants held stock in the Virginia Company of London which financed the Jamestown settlement. They sent three ships, the Susan Constant, Godspeed, and Discovery with 144 colonist aboard. They came ashore on May 13, 1607 twenty miles up the James River. There they made a base for further exploration. On June 22 Captain Christopher Newport sailed back to England and only 104 colonists remained in Jamestown. This set a pattern of forward and backward migration. The same cultural communication continued between the fringe of a settlement and its place of origin.

It was many of the so called “gentlemen” who remained in Jamestown. They were of “gentile” families with registered coats of arms. They were a narrow elite of very young and very English men.

- 60% – were of the elite class, younger sons of the Gentry
- 20% – were skilled workers including, German and Polish ship builders, and Italian glass workers
- 20% – were laborers or servants

In 1608, there were 409 colonists in Jamestown. Shortly after arrival there came a starving time. In 1609, only 60 men remained. In 1619, every parish in England was urged to send its poor to Virginia. In three years over 3,500 settlers were sent to Virginia.

By 1625, about 8,000 people had been sent since the beginning of the settlement and only 5% of them were the “elite.” This included children as young as one year whose rank was fixed at birth. At the time most were single males of humble rank and half of them were servants. Scarcely anyone survived to middle age. Men outnumber women seven to one and only 5% of these had been born in Virginia. Only 65 of the 8,000 were women, and 43 of these were servants who were forbidden to marry.

EARLY FARMING, RELIGION, AND GOVERNMENT

From the beginning the of the settlement there was a system of forced labor on the collective farms. In 1614, the system began to shift from collective farming to private gardens. By 1617, each colonists was allowed 100 acres in fee simple and 50 acres more for every head right. Communal tobacco farming rapidly spread.

By 1624 the Virginia Company of Jamestown was bankrupt and Virginia became a Royal Colony. In 1625, half of the colonists were servants and half of them were owned by ten men. By 1642, the colony had grown considerably and was past its point of questionable survival.

The colony began religiously as the Church of England. By 1642, Puritans began settling in Norfolk and Nansemond counties, and on the Eastern Shore. In 1662 there was an upheaval between the Church of Scotland and the Quakers. The Quakers were pushed out of Scotland. Many came to Virginia and some settled in James City and Charles City Counties.

Sir William Berkeley had the Kings Commission as the royal governor of Virginia. In 1642, he started the peopling of Virginia. It was his view on laws and other institutions which ruled the colony. He recruited royalist elites and other persons of condition and good officers of war. When they arrived Berkeley promoted them to high offices and granted them large estates. This created an oligarchy that ran the colony for many generations.

By the 1650s the colony was made up of cavaliers and pioneers. The Puritans continued to settle in Plymouth, while the elite of Anglican faith came to Virginia. These cavalier immigrants founded the dynasties that would later be called the "First Family of Virginia." Two thirds of them arrived between 1640 and 1670. Many of the elite were a part of the "younger son syndrom."

WHERE THEY CAME FROM

Two thirds of the elite in the colony came from a triangle of South England from Weald of Kent down to Devon and north to Warwickshire, or just 21% of land acres of England. About 75% were from the area around London, only 8% were from North England and 7% from East Anglia. There were only a scattering from Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, or foreign countries.

The children of "younger sons" became merchants and tradesmen, without losing their identity as gentlemen. These families continued to intermarry when they arrived in Virginia.

GOVERNING CLASS

Virginia's Cavalier elite gained control of the powerful Royal Council and maintained control over it until the American Revolution. As late as 1775 every Council member was related to another member by blood or marriage. Twenty five families of the Council controlled the major distribution of the land.

Before 1775, 75% of the immigrants were humble people of low rank on the bottom of the middle class. Most were indentured servants who along with debtors fled to North Carolina for freedom.

SLAVERY

Slavery came late to Virginia. Before 1680 most slaves came from the West Indies. After 1720 nearly all came directly from Africa. The major influx occurred between 1700-1760 when 59,000 African slaves arrived. The rate of immigration was low, but Black reproduction (natural increase) was high. By 1710 there were 20,000 blacks in Virginia. By 1790 there were nearly 300,000.

NATIVE AMERICAN INDIANS

In 1607, Native Americans comprised of thirty-two subchiefdoms and about 150 villages. In general the immigrants interacted well with the Indians. However in 1622, Opechancaniugh, brother of Powhatan, attacked the English settlements killing 347 colonists. He attacked again in 1644 killing more than 500. By 1699 only about 1,800 natives were left, compared to more than 20,000 when the English arrived.

By the late 1600s some of the whites cohabited with the Indians in the Shenandoah Mountain frontier. Later on this interaction carried across to other parts of Virginia. Even today there are several Indian tribes remaining in Virginia. However, in the 1860 census all Indians were classified as Negro. In the 1870 census and later they were classified as Mulatto. In Virginia by law they were not allow to intermarry with whites until the early 1900s.

ON THE MOVE

Once in Virginia the immigrants didn't settle down, they continued to move throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Many Virginians were restless all their lives. This movement was so common that 20% of the population of a county disappeared within a single year and 50% in a single decade. These tendencies persisted for many generations. The poor moved more than the rich farmers.

Former servants and the other poor were looking for land and work. They were a floating population who moved often and for greater distances than they had in England. When the time came for the sheriff to collect tithables they moved on. Most migrants remained within the colony. When the authorities cracked down, the “removers” left the colony all together. In some cases the “removers” settled on land the elite had used up and left behind. This was prevalent in New Kent County where they were called “rabble” by those who had stayed there.

THE REGIONS OF VIRGINIA

Gentlemen and planters loved to build near the water. They put large spaces between themselves and their neighbors. This created the cultural regions of Virginia.

The Tidewater – Has four sections: The Central Tidewater; The Lower Tidewater; The Eastern Shore; and The Chesapeake Islands.

The Central Tidewater – Was the cultural hearth of colonial Virginia between the James and the Rappahannock Rivers. It was defined by access to the sea and was made up of pleasant plains, hills and fertile valleys. Ships could anchor directly by the gentlemen’s door. However, the tidewater swamp lands were very unhealthy.

The Lower Tidewater – Consisted of Hampton, Newport News and Norfolk areas and was part of Virginia’s Maritime Frontier

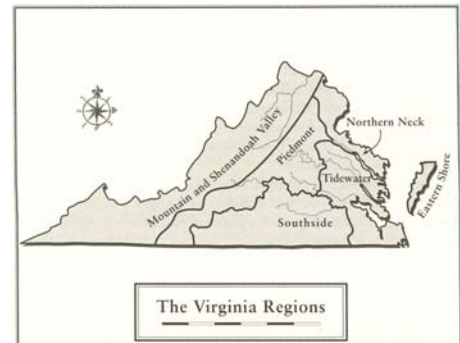
The Chesapeake Islands – Were also part of Virginia’s Maritime Frontier. This area included the more populated area of Smith and Tangier Islands. They were waterman who came from the west coast of England—the fishing ports of Devon and Cornwall. They settled here in the 17th century and had a distinct dialect which resembled what is often called the “Old King’s English.” People who are not familiar with the area have a very hard time understanding them.

The Eastern Shore – Across the broad waters of the Chesapeake Bay, lay the Eastern Shore of Virginia. In the 17th century it was as much a frontier as any other region. It had its own forts and Indian wars and patterns of settlement. It expanded north to Maryland’s Eastern Shore below the Choptank River and into Sussex and Kent counties of Delaware. It was a seat of religious dissent with settlements of Puritans and Quakers on the 17th century and Methodists in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Northern Neck – Included the land between the Potomac and the Rappahannock Rivers. Five million acres stretched from the Chesapeake Bay to the Shenandoah Valley. It consisted of land given by Charles I to several of the English elite, some who went on to establish a Virginia dynasty. It contains Lancaster, Westmoreland and Northumberland counties. Eventually the consortium of the King’s supporters was consolidated down to one family alone—the Culpepers. Through them it was inherited by the Fairfax family and was considered a rich man’s country. Thomas, Sixth Lord Fairfax, claimed 5,282,000 acres in Virginia. Fairfax passed some of the land to the Robert (King) Carter. When King Carter died in 1732 he had an estate of 300,000 acres and 1,000 slaves. He was the richest man in Virginia.

The South Side – Included a broad crescent of territory below the Appomattox River and extended from the Tidewater to the mountains. It was slow in development because the rivers flowed south and were not navigable. They flowed away from the Chesapeake Bay. William Byrd II owned 105,000 acres along the Dan and Roanoke Rivers and tried to sell it to Swiss immigrants with little luck. He eventually sold it to settlers from North England and Scotch-Irish. Most settlers in the area came from Henrico, Goochland, and Hanover counties near the falls of the James. Many of these people moved to North Carolina. Some of those that left came back. With the construction of more roads the population began to move, and by 1810 larger numbers of people began to settle in this area.

The Piedmont – In the Valley of the James beyond the fall line lay one of the largest regions in the Old Dominion. It was known as the Backcountry of Virginia and extended from the Chesapeake Tidewater to the Blue Ridge Mountains. It had highly fertile deep red clay and healthy climates. It was first settled by former indentured servants as squatters on the land. They were pushed out by the elite like William Byrd II who had inherited 1,800 acres at the falls of the James River. He was later granted 7,251 acres for settling 250 tithables. Other elite established large estates in the Piedmont and intermarried with the elite of the Tidewater and Northern Neck. Alexander Spotswood was instrumental in opening up the Rappahannock and



Shenandoah Valleys with a large number of miners who took over the land. Slaves were brought in directly or purchased from plantation in the Tidewater. The land was healthier and the slave families expanded.

By the mid-18th century the Piedmont became the dominant region of Virginia. It had a larger dynamic, was more prosperous, and it was more healthy than the Tidewater. The Piedmont became the seed region that spread its folkways eventually through the American South. It expanded with a greater mix of settler origins and ethnicity. The newest groups of immigrants were the French Huguenots near the Carolina border, who moved into what is now Powhatan County. In 1705 the House of Burgesses allowed the Quakers the same liberties except exempting them from military service, if they supplied a substitute. Quakers came into the area in large numbers. Their leader obtained a charter for 100,000 acres in Frederick County. They were not movers and in general much older than other settlers. They did not settle near the Scotch-Irish or Calvinists, and they did not reverse migrate back to Pennsylvania.

The German movement started in 1683. They were fleeing war, conscription, taxes, confiscation, oppression, persecution, and tyranny in Europe. They came from Southwestern Germany to Pennsylvania. About half of them came on the great wave from 1748-1754. They settled in Virginia about 1715 in Germanna, where they were a very close built family community. The Swiss Germans were displeased with Spotswood, their English employer, and in 1721 when they could move on from their established term of service they settled Germantown. Their move consisted mostly of families. Some entire neighborhoods and congregations of many different religions came to America. In 1734, Jost Hite was granted 100,000 acres which he sold in 100 to 500 acres lots to other Germans.

Scotch-Irish and British Borderers (North England and Scotland) came to the Piedmont between 1715-1775. More than a quarter million people moved from the borderlands of North Britain and Northern Ireland to the American Backcountry. They were of the warrior clans.

The makeup of the regions

By 1790 the Old Dominion was by far the most populous state in the American Confederation. The Old Dominion was nearly as large as the next two states combined (Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.) The regions of Virginia each had an unmistakable character.

Central Tidewater – Was made up of a system of plantations in which most of the populations were African-American slaves.

Southern Tidewater and Eastern Shore – Was made up of maritime commerce.

Southside – Was made up of modest farms and small plantations, also with a large African-American population.

Northern Neck – Was the “rich man’s country” of large plantations and tenant farmers.

Piedmont and the Valley of Virginia - Was made of of prosperous farms, orchards and livestock.

Migration beyond Virginia

Many immigrants felt that after they have spent some time on any piece of land, they should move on to another where they hoped to do better. Having once moved they were not satisfied. After the American Revolution it was scarcely possible in any part of the continent to find a man, amongst the middling and lower classes of Americans, who has not changed his farm and residence many different times.

Structural streams of migration

- In the 1600s was to Carolina from the Southside and southern parts of the Shenandoah Valley. To the coasts of the Carolinas and Georgia.
- In the early 1700s the Piedmont Stream moved to the Southern Highlands and the Carolina Backcountry.
- Another flow was from the Valley of Virginia to the southwest. The elite moved from the Piedmont to Kentucky. While others moved from the Northern Neck, and the Western and Northern Valleys of Virginia, to Ohio.
- In the late 1700s the Valley Stream from the Valleys of Virginia moved to the Valley of Eastern Tennessee.
- In 1779-1780 there was a large movement of Virginians who moved to middle Tennessee. Over time many of these moved north to Kentucky and south to Alabama.
- Another movement about 1783 was from The Valley of Virginia and the Piedmont to Kentucky, as well as south to Cass and Cherokee Counties of Georgia.

- The migration stream that flowed from Virginia to Ohio continued across southern Indiana on to Illinois to the Mississippi River.
- After 1803 they continued beyond the Mississippi with the acquisition of Louisiana.
- So many Virginians moved to the central eastern part of Missouri that they developed what has come to be known as “Little Dixie.”

All of this migration was followed by the “Gone to Texas” movement, when in the 1840s Virginians from Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee, as well as some who had moved to Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi moved to Texas.

Virginians helped settle every state from the Virginia Backcountry to the Rocky Mountains and beyond.

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