

The Naval Stores and Potash Men. The Jamestown area had an abundance of pine trees which had a gummy sticky sap. This resin could also be used to protect wood from the weather, especially the wooden hulls of ships. Naval stores at first meant everything necessary to build a ship but in the colonial period it especially meant tar, pitch, and turpentine. Potash was made by placing tree ashes in a pot and adding water; the product was used in glass making and soap.

The Glassmakers. From a visual perspective, glass making would seem a natural for the colony. There was sand from the beaches, lime from oyster shells, potash from burning the abundant trees and most importantly, the ability to get a high temperature using charcoal and wood to melt the mixture. Glass makers in England were required to use coal which did not produce the necessary high temperature; therefore, they used glass slabs or recycled glass. It is interesting that both Germans and Poles claim the Jamestown Glassmaker as one of their own, but the evidence is insufficient because both areas in Europe had glass manufacturing industries. Unfortunately, this was the least successful industry and operations soon ended.

Summary

The arrival of these non-English craftsmen began industries which helped the colony survive. There is no information how many died in the Starving Time when two thirds of the colonists died or how many new arrivals came to take their place. Although their industries did not survive because of the arrival of tobacco, what did survive was their determination to be treated equally and have the right to vote.

No vote. No work.

The example the Polish craftsmen showed by their industrious work ethic and their efforts to gain their own individual freedom provided a model for generations of colonists and Americans.

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POLISH CRAFTSMEN'S CIVIL RIGHTS ACTION

FOR THE RIGHT TO VOTE

JAMESTOWN, VIRGINIA

JULY 21, 1619



POLES IN JAMESTOWN BY ARTHUR SZYK, 1939

DEPICTION OF THE JAMESTOWN POLISH CRAFTSMEN

1619 Jamestown, Virginia

1619 in Jamestown, Virginia brought together three events which foreshadowed the history of voting rights from the time of English colonies to the present United States of America.

First, in 1619, the Governor of Virginia, Sir George Yeardley, returned from England with instructions to form the first elected legislative body in colonial America. The new assembly was meant to give "*free liberty*" to all men through "*freely elected*" representatives who would make laws for the land. Suffrage however, was not extended to all of the colonists, but only to English men. This system provided voting rights as a birth right to certain people who controlled this right by limiting participation to certain ethnic, religious or racial groups.

Next, in August of 1619 an English man-of-war with "*20 and odd*" Africans on board entered the port of Jamestown. Little is known of these newly arrived people and it is unlikely that the 20 or so newcomers became slaves upon their arrival. The social status of the first Africans in Jamestown was confusing, and perhaps deliberately ambiguous. Records from 1623 and 1624 list the black inhabitants of the colony as servants, not slaves. In these same records, however, white indentured servants are listed along with the year in which they were to attain freedom; no such year accompanies the names of black servants.

In the book he later wrote, called "*The True Travels*", John Smith describes how he crossed Poland, after he escaped his slavery at the hands of the Turks aided by people with, as he said, "*Respect, Mirth, Content and Entertainment.*" In addition to their hospitality, he observed their personal industriousness and skill at various trades which would be useful in a pioneering environment.

Why were they needed

Encouraging English glassmakers to leave an industry at home and set up business in a strange land across the ocean was not easy. One source claimed that English glass production was primarily from recycled glass, therefore, production from primary material, as was required in Jamestown, was not very common in England. Naval stores were purchased from other European countries, which in the next war could be the enemy; therefore, Jamestown's production was valuable. Also England's trees used for lumber were in short supply so lumber products from Jamestown would be another profitable export product.

What did they do

The Lumbermen. The description of the work of "millners" does not include a water powered saw mill. Orli states "most woodwork would have been through splitting, with wedges and froes lumber, including the preparation of clapboard. A saw would be used to crosscut rather than rip wood."

At that time the Netherlands was more of a defined country than were the German-speaking duchies, kingdoms and states. A case can be made that the unnamed craftsmen did not really come from "Germany" in the modern geographical scope of the word, so it is not entirely accurate to refer to them as "German" either. Ethnicity is further complicated by the fact that the German minority in Royal Prussia lived under Polish rule during this period.

Being a Pole, on the other hand, probably meant being a resident of The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, formally the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It was one of the largest and most populous countries of 16th and 17th century Europe. The Commonwealth covered not only the territories of what is now Poland and Lithuania, but also the entire territory of Belarus and Latvia, large parts of Ukraine and Estonia, and part of present-day western Russia.

There are, however, a few clues from the early sources. A source dated 1603 stated that as early as 1585, Walter Raleigh was urged to look to Prussia and Poland for *“Men skilfull in burning of Sope ashes, and in making of Pitch, and Tarre, and Rozen... which are thence to be had for small wages.”*

Thus began a process which codified the status as a slave in the 1660s, with no right to vote and having no individual or civil rights which remained in place for over 200 years, first in the colonies and later in the United States.

Though the specifics of what occurred next may be lost to history, the Virginia Company records indicate that Polish craftsmen caused a civil rights action in the form of a work stoppage demanding suffrage. According to court records dated 21 July 1619: *“Upon some dispute of the Polonians resident in Virginia, it was now agreed (notwithstanding any former order to the country) that they shall be enfranchized, and made as free as any inhabitant there whatsoever”*. What was not answered is whether the Poles won the right to vote for all non-English craftsmen.

In this case the Polonians had economic leverage in the form of manufacturing skills which were used to gain the right to vote, *“and because their skill in making pitch & tar and soap-ashes shall not dye with them, it is agreed that some young men, shall be put unto them to learne their skill & knowledge therein for the benefitt of the Country hereafter.”*

The example the *Polonians* showed by their industrious work ethic and their efforts to gain their own individual freedom provided a model for generations of colonists and Americans.

Non-English Craftsmen

There is virtually nothing written about the civil rights actions of the Poles in contemporary sites including the official Jamestown site. Also there is very little written about the non-English craftsmen who arrived at a critical time when, without them, the colony might have failed for the lack of production of products which could be sold in the English market. Their skills became less important with the planting of tobacco, which soon produced the largest cash return. Because so little is known about these craftsmen, we can only explore: Who were they; Why were they needed; and What did they do.

How is it that Poles, rather than Englishmen, migrated to the colony, and were other non-English speaking countries represented among the craftsmen? It is recorded that on October 1, 1608 the second supply ship from London, the "*Mary & Margaret*," arrived in Jamestown. Referred to as the Second Supply, 70 new English colonists arrived, who were either company shareholders or servants of shareholders, and were named on the list of passengers. Also included on the Second Supply were the first non-English craftsmen and industry specialists, not named but designated as eight "*Dutch-men and Poles*". Their resident status was not stated; however, by 1619 the Poles considered themselves Jamestown residents with the right to vote and to be represented.

The company recruited these as skilled master craftsmen and industry specialists to teach and organize new industries. They soon began making soap-ash, glass, lumber milling (wainscot, clapboard, and 'deal' – planks, especially pine), naval stores especially important for a naval country like England (pitch, turpentine, and tar), and explored for mining locations. The original colony investors were expecting to mine gold to make the colony profitable but as Alvin Duke Chandler president of the College of William and Mary remarked "*the colony's only profitable industries were those operated by Polish settlers.*"

Reasonable questions remain, records are scarce regarding the "*Dutch-men and Poles*". Rick Orli, in his review titled "*The Identity of the 1608 Jamestown Craftsmen*," provides a comprehensive review of the issue with a list of sources.

Who were they

"Dutch-men and Poles" is the only description of the original non-English craftsmen, allowing various ethnic groups to claim whatever trade they have determined was naturally their occupation. At that time a person speaking the present-day German language was referred to as a Dutchman. however, it cannot be definitively proven that the woodworkers of Jamestown could not have been from the Netherlands.