**JOHN SMITH Biography**

Born in 1579 in Lincolnshire, England, John Smith eventually made his way to America to help govern the British colony of Jamestown. After allegedly being saved from death by Pocahontas, he established trading agreements with native tribes. With his governing tactics called into question, he returned to England in 1609 and became an advocate of colonization via his published works.

**Early Life**

John Smith is believed to have been born in 1579 in Lincolnshire, England. After a merchant’s apprenticeship, Smith decided on a life of combat and served with the English Army abroad. Working as a soldier for hire (professing to be highly successful in his military ventures), Smith eventually embarked on a campaign against the Turks in Hungary. There he was captured and enslaved. He was sent to what is now Istanbul and served a kindhearted woman who, not wanting Smith to be her slave, sent him to her brother’s home, where he was forced to do farm work. After receiving harsh treatment from his master, Smith killed him and escaped, returning to England in the early 1600s.

**Jamestown Settlement**

Smith met with Capt. Bartholomew Gosnold, who was involved with organizing a colony sponsored by the Virginia Company of London that would be sent to America. Smith was made part of a multi-person council that would govern the group, whose purpose was to generate profit in the form of mineral wealth (gold) and goods.

The voyagers set sail at the end of 1606. But during the trip, Smith was allegedly accused of mutiny and almost hanged. Managing to stay alive yet placed into custody, he arrived with the group at Chesapeake Bay in April 1607.

The settlement was named Jamestown and would be the first permanent British North American colony. Yet initially the population dwindled as colonists succumbed to starvation and disease. The settlers were attempting to claim a region that was home to multiple Native American communities, all part of the Powhatan Confederacy.

Released from custody weeks after arrival, Smith helped overturn the leadership of colony president Edward Wingfield. Working with new president John Ratcliffe, Smith was tasked with overseeing the barter of food from the surrounding native tribes. He had also started to explore the region, which would later be detailed in publications.

In an expedition along the Chickahominy River, Smith was captured by a native band and taken to a chief whom the English referred to as Powhatan. It is said that Powhatan's 12-year-old daughter, Pocahontas, rushed to save Smith from being killed as he was held down. After this, Powhatan allegedly regarded Smith as a figurative "son," granting him territory while having expectations of allegiance and mutual protection. There are historians who question whether this event actually happened, as the relationship between Smith and Pocahontas has been largely romanticized by popular culture. It is also theorized that Smith might have been taking part in a ritualized acceptance ceremony as opposed to an actual execution. Powhatan possibly saw Smith as a resource to trade for arms, and hence wanted him alive.

Upon returning to Jamestown, Smith was imprisoned for losing men on the failed expedition and on suspicion that he would try to take control of the colony with his new allies. He was soon freed and relations between Native Americans and the settlement went smoothly for a time. Pocahontas often visited the colony, arriving with her people as they brought goods.

In 1608, Smith dispatched a letter to England about what had been occurring, and it was published in a book - the first book to come from American soil. In the same year, he was elected president of the governing council, going on to contend with a difficult winter. Smith demanded a work ethic from settlers with the hope of increasing survival. He utilized harsh measures to keep them in line.

Due to a debilitating drought, Native-American food supplies were scarce, and the Powhatan community refused to supply limited rations. Smith responded by waging attacks on natives—ordering the burning of villages in some cases—and stealing food. Native people were also imprisoned, beaten and forced into labor.

**Return to England**

In 1609, after the Virginia Company had drafted a new charter for Jamestown, Smith was badly burned from a gunpowder explosion. He returned to England both to recover and face allegations of misconduct, thereby relinquishing leadership of the settlement. There are no records of a subsequent hearing or trial.

Back in Britain, Smith produced a published report on Virginia that included detailed descriptions of its tribal communities, flora, fauna and overall topography. In 1614, he visited the coast of Maine and Massachusetts and came up with the name "New England" to describe the region, as well as designating certain bodies of water.

Smith met Pocahontas again after she traveled to England in 1616 with husband John Rolfe and son Thomas. Believing that Smith was dead, she was astonished that he’d never informed her that he was alive or intervened as matters worsened between the colonists and the Powhatans.

**Later Years**

After unsuccessful efforts to return to America, Smith increasingly focused on writing. He published more books that detailed his time abroad, pushing for colonization of New England. Some of his works include Smith tended to lie and exaggerate his exploits. He died in London on June 21, 1631.

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1. What happened to John Smith in his early life in the military?

2. When did he get into trouble on the voyage to the New World?

3. What happened on his expedition to the Chickonimy river?

4. Describe the encounter with Pocahontas

5. What measures did he take to get people in Jamestown to work?

6. What help did the colonists receive from the local Indians

7. What cause further starvation?

8. Why was he forced to return to England?

9. What did he do for the rest of his life back in England?