

The Colony on the James and its "Significant Other"

Almost all of us hereabouts have been introduced to the arrival of the English on our hallowed shores in 1607, and the development of Jamestown along the banks of the James River. At first, times were hard but with help from abroad it gradually became a more useful English colony.

Then, for a number of reasons, the Powhatan Indians, who had generally occupied the region for hundreds of years, sent an army of warriors down the James River in 1622 with the intension of wiping out the colony and recovering their land. Some 400 colonists were killed; but fortunately for the colonists, they were able to bring together sufficient strength to drive the Indians back to their land some five to eight miles to the north across the Pawmunkey River (which ultimately became the York River several years later). This counter attack was handled by two members of the English military who were given the rank of Captain and enough support to do what they had to do. They were Captain John West and Captain John Utey. These two gentlemen were given 600 acres each in recognition of their leadership of the retaliatory militias and, at the same time, to keep the Indians on the other side of the Pawmunkey.

Captain West established his plantation in 1632 and he and his family lived there until 1650. Although Capt. West was a military man by training, his plantation was successful in providing food for the English colony. The land was quite fertile, and the Indians had cared for it well until they were displaced. Additionally, tobacco was coming into its own as a profitable crop. His plantation is now the Naval Weapons Station.

Ensign John Utey and his wife had arrived on the James River in 1623' and had established their plantation named Utopia there. He had become a Captain and served as a Burgess until 1630. He then joined Captain West in driving the Indians over the Pawmunkey River. He established his 600 acre plantation (which he called Utiemaria after his wife) slightly up river from that of John West and, like West, was active in sustaining the colony around Jamestown. Utey's plantation now forms Cheatham Annex and parts of New Quarter Park.

Site of West's Plantation



Site of Utiemaria



This was just the beginning of the establishment of a whole series of plantations along the Pawmunkey River which became the Charles River and then the York. The Indians just across the river were clearly outnumbered, and those that were left moved northward to the Rappahannock. The result was an extension of the Jamestown colony all the way from the source of the York River at West Point down to its mouth at the Chesapeake Bay.

This became the Significant Other of the Jamestown settlement on the James.

—*Lee Hirsh*—