

I Survived the Starving Time

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The Starving Time was located in Jamestown, Virginia in the winter of 1609-1610. At this time, food was a shortage, leadership was fractured and a siege by the Powhatan Indian warriors killed two of every three colonists at the James Fort. From its beginning, the colony struggled to maintain food supplies. Trade relations with the Virginia tribes were strained because a severe seven year drought stressed food supplies for everyone in the region. Captain John Smith had some success trading European goods for corn in the first two years of settlement, but his strongarm tactics also angered the tribal communities. Aware of the food shortages, the Virginia Company sent a fleet of nine ships in July of 1609 with the new colonists and enough supplies to last through the winter. However, the fleet was scattered and damaged by a hurricane. The largest ship, *the Sea Venture*, was shipwrecked on the island of Bermuda, with much of the supplies and leaders, such as Captain Christopher Newport, Sir George Somers and Sir Thomas Gates. In mid August some of the ships arrived at Jamestown with 300 colonists and a few supplies. Smith was badly burned by a mysterious gunpowder explosion and he was forced to return to England in October. George Percy became the president of the council and faced the lethal combination of dwindling food supplies. An order of Chief Powhatan was given that warriors should attack any colonists and livestock outside the fort.

Percy later wrote that "indians killed as fast without (the fort) as famine and pestilence did within. Percy calculated that the meager rations of half a can of meal a day would get them only halfway through the terrible winter. He wrote that to satisfy their "Crewell hunger," some went into the woods looking for serpents and snakes to digge the earth for wylde and unknown rootes," but those people "were cutt off an slayne by the savages."

Starvation weakened the colonists and led to sickness such as dysentery and typhoid. The colonists ate shoe leather and butchered seven horses, brought from England the summer before on the ill-fated fleet. Percy wrote, "then having fed upon horses and other beasts a they lasted, we glad to make shift with vermin, as dogs, cats and mice." There were charges of cannibalism: Starving settlers dug up" dead corpses outt of graves: to eat them, and others "licked upp the Bloode whichc hald fallen from their weake fellowes." Jamestown Rediscovery archeologists, in 2012 uncovered the first forensic evidence of survival cannibalism in a European colony in North America.

The Sea Venture survivors arrived from Bermuda in May 1610 to find only 60 colonists still alive in the fort. Thomas Gates realized there would be further starvation within a few weeks: on June 7, 1610, he announced the colonists would abandon Jamestown and sail for England. However, their path home was blocked by the arriving ship of the new governor, Lord De La Warr, who insisted they return and rebuild Jamestown. "Nothing was spared to mainteyne Lyfe and to doe those things which seame incredible." -George Percy.

I think the Starving Time was an important time in American history because the colonists arrived, thinking they would find gold and silver, raw materials and new markets for

trade. Instead, it was extremely difficult even to survive as much of them did not have labor or survival skills. However, in the end the settlement of Jamestown was the first permanent settlement in the colonies after several failed attempts, such as the Lost Colony of Roanoke. The settlement of Jamestown was where our country truly began.

Roux, Renee. "Starving Time." *American History*, ABC-CLIO, 2018, americanhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/370867. Accessed 22 Feb. 2018.