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Seventeenth Century Settlement of the Nansemond River in Virginia

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ABSTRACT

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY SETTLEMENT OF THE
NANSEMOND RIVER IN VIRGINIA

Emmett Edward Bottoms
Old Dominion University, 1983
Director: Dr. Peter C. Stewart

The estuarine Nansemond River in southeastern
Virginia provided exploitable resources to Indians and
English colonists during the seventeenth century. Coloni­
zation of the Nansemond, attempted in 1609, was resisted by
the Nansemond Indians and was accomplished only after they
were decimated and displaced. Anglicans and dissenting
Puritans and Quakers established churches and meeting
houses along the river. Richard Bennett, a Puritan and
later a Quaker, brought the first Negro into the Nansemond
River area and served as Governor of Virginia. Settlers
established farms, conformed to a socio-political system,
questioned royal authority during Bacon's Rebellion, and
were afforded the protection of a fort and the economic
opportunities of a town. Archeological evidence encountered
during excavations of four trash pits has provided insights
into the culture, subsistence, and economy of the colonists
of the Nansemond River during the seventeenth century.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere appreciation is extended to Peter C. Stewart, Helen C. Rountree, and James L. Bugg, Jr., for their reviews and constructive criticisms of the thesis.

I have loving memories of, and am grateful to, my grandfather, the late Emmett Bottoms, who fostered my interest in history and archeology.

I am indebted most to my wife Joan, and children Jennifer and Jeremy, and to my parents for their patience, understanding, and encouragement.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The estuarine Nansemond River follows a meandering, twenty mile, marsh-fringed course northward from the metropolitan section of the City of Suffolk, Virginia, and empties its two-mile wide mouth into the James River immediately west of the harbor of Hampton Roads. During the past twelve thousand years the shores of the Nansemond have hosted Indians, explorers and colonists, farmers and plantation owners, Loyalists and Patriots, Yankees and Rebels in encampments and fortifications, wharves and industrial plants, and semi-rural housing communities. Its waters have been employed and exploited for fishing, trade, travel, and recreation (Figure 1).

Twentieth-century developments have altered the rural character of the Nansemond River. Bridges have replaced ferries, gravel roads have been widened and paved with asphalt, tenant farmers' houses have been demolished, and fields have become the sites of residential communities including "Bridge Point Farms" at Holladay's Point, "Point Harbor" and "Bennett's Harbor" at Wills Cove, and "Schooner Cove" near Sleepy Hole Point. Post offices have been relocated from the corners of woodstove-heated general stores
Figure 1
The Nansemond River In Virginia 1983

Scale 0 1 2 3 Miles
to brick structures with Zip-coded identifications in the villages of Eclipse, Chuckatuck, and Driver, and family-owned general stores now are in competition with corporately owned fast-service food marts in those formerly small, quaint communities. Golf courses and campgrounds occupy what were farms at Cedar Point and Sleepy Hole Point.

Although data on twentieth-century developments along the Nansemond River are available, the roles played by its seventeenth-century settlers have not been defined, investigated, or reported except in works nearly devoid of references to primary sources of information. The absences of primary documentations in previous works are not indicative of errors of commission or omission, or lack of dedication; instead, they are the consequence of the confounding fact that the court records of Nansemond County (which merged with, and took the name of, the City of Suffolk on January 1, 1974) were destroyed by fires in 1734, 1779, and 1866.

Fillmore Norfleet expressed the lament of historians who might wish to research the extirpated records of the Nansemond County Court in noting that

This total destruction of the past has presented an almost insurmountable problem to historians and genealogists, professional or otherwise, who have sought to throw light on the people who lived in and the events that have taken place within the confines of one of the oldest counties in Virginia.¹

The historian confronts the problem of determining

the roles played by the settlers of the Nansemond River during the seventeenth century without benefit of county records. The solution to the problem is sought in historical works dealing generally with the subject of seventeenth-century Virginia, in records of the General Court of Virginia, in documents of the House of Burgesses, and in other primary sources.

Archeological discoveries at Jamestown Island,² the Jamestown Glasshouse,³ Holladay's Point,⁴ Martin's Hundred,⁵ and other colonial sites in Virginia have supplemented historical records. Data derived from archeological investigations are especially important to a study of the Nansemond River because of the paucity of colonial documents. Artifacts are non-verbal primary sources which provide information on material culture and insights regarding the lifestyle, wealth, and social standing of a site's inhabitants. Ivor Noel Hume, Director of the Department of Archaeology of Colonial Williamsburg, argued that


Archaeology has been described as a handmaiden to history. Its products offer, at worst, an inadequate substitute for lost documents, and at best they provide dull historians and intimidating words with an added dimension. . . .

Archaeological investigations have been conducted at four sites with seventeenth-century components along the Nansemond River during the past decade. Analyses of materials from those sites have provided data on the diets, clothing, smoking and drinking habits, and economic status of some of those who occupied the banks of the river during its first century of settlement and, thus, have afforded a new dimension to the few extant written records.

The Nansemond River remains a subject for archaeological investigation and historical research. My purpose has been to combine primary and secondary sources with archaeologically recovered data in order to prepare an account of the Nansemond River and its settlers during the seventeenth century.

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6 Ibid., p. 323.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Although many works cover the history of Virginia, very few contain comments about the settlement of the Nansemond River. All carry accounts of seventeenth-century events; however, attention is usually directed to what their authors consider the most significant happenings. Although the Nansemond River and its colonists are mentioned in general histories, they are not the subjects of definitive discussions.

Campbell noted only that Captain John Smith visited the Nansemond River in 1608 and "procured [from the Indians] as much corn as he could carry away."\(^1\) Chandler and Thames provided an undocumented survey history of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Virginia with no specific references to the colonization of the Nansemond.\(^2\)

Stanard's twenty-four chapter work, which she presented in 1928 as "the most complete story of seventeenth-century Virginia that has been written," was detailed and 


\(^2\)J. A. C. Chandler and T. B. Thames, Colonial Virginia (Richmond, Va: Times-Dispatch Co., 1907).
replete with direct quotations of those who shaped the colony during its first one hundred years. Unfortunately, "a severe and long-continued illness" precluded Stanard from completing a bibliography. ³

Thomas J. Wertenbaker proposed that the "history of Virginia was . . . built up around the Indian plant tobacco," and he based *The Planters of Colonial Virginia* on that premise. His important contributions include analyses of the Nansemond County Rent Rolls of 1702 and 1704 and his inclusion of the Rent Roll list of the county for 1704. ⁴

In 1938 R. Bennett Bean, Professor of Anatomy at the University of Virginia, published *The Peopling of Virginia*, an anthropometric study of the "measurement[s] of Old Virginians . . . who had been in one environment for at least three generations." In that work he included summary histories of the counties of Virginia with attention to the ethnic and national origins of the settlers of each. ⁵

Matthew Page Andrews provided a "'critical and narrative' exposition on the theme of the Old Dominion," designed to be of interest to historians and the "gentle reader." His *Virginia: The Old Dominion* included refer-


ences to primary and secondary sources while presenting only minimal information on the Nansemond River.6

The Virginia Experiment: The Old Dominion's Role in the Making of America, 1607-1781, by Alf J. Mapp, Jr., "was written both for the Virginian interested in his Commonwealth's story and the non-Virginian whose primary interest is the mainstream of American history." Mapp's purpose, in this volume which of necessity dealt cursorily with the Nansemond River, was "to tell in readable fashion the story of Virginia's contributions to the making of the nation . . ." during the colonial period.7

General histories of Virginia, including Virginius Dabney's Virginia: The New Dominion,8 have not addressed matters specifically concerning the settlement of the Nansemond River during the seventeenth century. Other historical works dealing with Nansemond County and its immediate environs are characterized by the lack of primary references; however, they cannot be dismissed, nor can their authors be disparaged, for within them are clues to original sources of information beyond what might have been contained within the records of the Nansemond County Court.


Among the earlier histories of Nansemond County is that by Henry Howe in *Historical Collections of Virginia* published in 1846. A summary of Virginia historical documents, it contains only an account of the burning of the town of Suffolk, Virginia, by British troops on May 13, 1779.⁹

In 1886 Edward Pollock provided a brief history of Nansemond County in his privately printed *Sketch Book of Suffolk, Va.: Its People and Its Trade*, a work replete with advertisements of business establishments. Pollock added no information on the Nansemond River to that provided within Howe's *Historical Collections of Virginia*;¹⁰ in fact, he quoted Howe directly in reporting the burning of Suffolk in 1779.¹¹

*The History of Nansemond County, Virginia*, by Joseph B. Dunn, contains a narrative account of the seventeenth-century exploration and settlement of the Nansemond River as well as in-text references to primary historical sources. Important features of Dunn's *The History of *

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¹⁰Ibid.

Nansemond County, Virginia are lists of the clerks of the Nansemond County Court and the county's members of the Governor's Council and House of Burgesses.  

During the spring and summer of 1930 the Suffolk (Va.) News Herald printed, in installments, the "Outline History of Nansemond County," by Wilbur A. MacClenny, a Suffolk businessman and amateur historian. Published in a single volume in 1976, the "Outline" contained undocumented information regarding the exploration and settlement of the Nansemond River during the seventeenth century.

From 1907 until his death in 1922, William Turner Jordan, M.D., compiled A Record of Farms and Their Owners in Lower Parish of Nansemond County, Virginia. Dr. Jordan's record contains personal remembrances and hearsay information; however, as William W. Jones noted in the introduction, Jordan did not intend to "produce a work of sufficient interest to warrant publication . . . [it was written by Jordan] 'thinking it would probably interest my children and grandchildren.'" The important features of Dr. Jordan's record are references to colonial farms and placenames.

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Popular interest in seventeenth-century Virginia was piqued in 1957 by the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the establishment of Jamestown when, from spring through fall, people from many nations visited Jamestown Festival Park with its Old World and New World Pavilions, Indian Lodge, and replicated Fort James, as well as Jamestown Island, the site of the original settlement. Visitors to Jamestown and the Festival Park purchased postcards, flags, tri-corner hats, emblazoned banners, and other souvenirs, and some purchased one or more titles in a series of books especially prepared for the celebration.

While planning and promoting the Jamestown Festival, the Virginia 350th Anniversary Celebration Corporation published twenty-three volumes on a variety of subjects including Indians, agriculture, architecture, fishing, medicine, industries, and religion in seventeenth-century Virginia. In each volume are references to primary sources which are useful to historians, archeologists, ethnologists, sociologists, and others who wish to research specific facets of Virginia's first century of colonization.  

15 The History of Lower Tidewater Virginia contains data relating specifically to Nansemond County and generally to the Nansemond River. However, in-text references

15 The twenty-three volumes were published in 1957 by the Virginia 350th Anniversary Celebration Corporation, Williamsburg, Virginia, under the editorship of E. G. Swem, Librarian Emeritus of the College of William and Mary.
to primary sources are absent, and individual chapter bibliographies are not sufficient to provide assistance for further research.\textsuperscript{16}

The latest work regarding the subject under consideration was Ann H. Burton's \textit{History of Suffolk and Nansemond County, Virginia}, an eighty-page volume commissioned by the Suffolk-Nansemond Chamber of Commerce in 1958 at the conclusion of the Suffolk-Nansemond County 350th Anniversary Festival. Because of the "lack of original sources . . . due in large measure to the devastating fires that have swept [Suffolk] since 1779. . . ." Burton did not "claim to have written a history, but rather to have compiled and edited [an] account . . . [for] documentation was neither necessary nor feasible."\textsuperscript{17}

Other secondary works dealing with seventeenth-century Virginia are useful in researching specific topics. Among them are \textit{The Conquest of Virginia: The Second Attempt} which deals with the settlement of Virginia from 1607 to 1610,\textsuperscript{18} and \textit{The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society and Politics in}


which immigration, mortality, marriage, and political subjects are discussed.\textsuperscript{19}

The most comprehensive works regarding politics, government, education, social life, religion, taxation, and economy in seventeenth-century Virginia are those by Philip Alexander Bruce. His \textit{Social Life in Virginia in the Seventeenth Century},\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century},\textsuperscript{21} and \textit{Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century}\textsuperscript{22} are invaluable sources of information.

Primary sources of data are essential for historical research. Among the primary sources relating to exploration and settlement of the Nansemond River during the seventeenth century are \textit{The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles} by John Smith,\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19}Thad W. Tate and David L. Ammerman, eds., \textit{The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society and Politics} (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1979).
\item \textsuperscript{20}Philip Alexander Bruce, \textit{Social Life in Virginia in the Seventeenth Century} (Richmond, Va.: Whittet and Shepperson, 1907).
\item \textsuperscript{22}Philip Alexander Bruce, \textit{Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century}, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910).
\end{itemize}
and "A Trewe Relacyon of the Procedeinge and Ocurrentes of Momente w\textsuperscript{ch} have hapned in Virginia," by George Percy.\textsuperscript{24}

The more comprehensive works concerning early colonial policy are The Records of the Virginia Company of London.\textsuperscript{25} Hening's The Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia are invaluable for research regarding the laws of colonial Virginia.\textsuperscript{26} The Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 1622-1632, 1670-1676,\textsuperscript{27} and Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia, June 11, 1680-June 22, 1699\textsuperscript{28} are important sources of primary information, as are the Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia.\textsuperscript{29}

The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary

\textsuperscript{24}George Percy, "A Trewe Relacyon of the Procedeinge and Ocurrentes of Momente w\textsuperscript{ch} have hapned in Virginia," Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine 3 (April 1922):259-82.


\textsuperscript{26}W. W. Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, 13 vols. (Richmond, Va., 1809-1823).

\textsuperscript{27}H. R. McIlwaine, ed., Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 1622-1632, 1670-1676 (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1924).


History of Virginia, 1606-1689 is an important source of information on government, sociology, the labor system, and economy.  

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CHAPTER THREE

INDIAN OCCUPATIONS: PALEO TO POWHATAN

Archeological evidence and historical documents indicate that the shores of the Nansemond River were inhabited by Indians intermittently from the close of the last Ice Age (Pleistocene Epoch) to the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Artifacts including stone spearpoints, arrowpoints, tools, and fragments of ceramic bowls have been discovered at an appreciable number of sites along both shores of the river. Many of the archeological sites are marked by extensive middens, accretional features composed of oyster shells, fish bones, animal bones, artifacts, and Indian skeletal remains. Such middens are common along the entire Atlantic Coast of the United States. Holmes estimated that shell middens in Virginia and Maryland alone covered "upward of one hundred thousand acres."\(^1\)

The first inhabitants of the Nansemond River area were Paleo-Indians, nomadic hunters who established short-term camps between 12,000 and 9,000 years ago. Paleo-  

Indian artifacts, including projectile points, scrapers, gravers, and knives, have been reported from the Dime Site on Holladay's Point, near the community of Chuckatuck, on the left bank of the Nansemond River.² (Figure 2)

At the close of the Pleistocene Epoch, approximately 9,000 years Before Present, Indian culture developed into the Archaic stage. The Archaic Period (ca. 9,000-3,000 years Before Present) was characterized by a marked population increase, a proliferation of tool forms and projectile point styles, and a semi-sedentary foraging subsistence system based on "complete harmonious parasitism upon the varied offerings of the woodlands [with] seasonal shifts in subsistence base."³

Artifacts of the Archaic Period are numerous at sites along the Nansemond River, including Holladay's Point, Wilkerson's Landing, and Brady's Marina on the left bank, and Town Point and Will's Cove on the right bank.⁴ The most prevalent artifacts at those localities are stone spearpoints, crude flaked axes and chisels, hammerstones, flaked stone scrapers and drills, and grooved, polished stone axes.

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⁴Edward Bottoms, "The History and Archeology of Wills Cove, Suffolk, Virginia" (research paper).
Figure 2
Indian Sites, Nansemond River, Virginia

PI - Paleo-Indian
A - Archaic
W - Woodland
H - Historic

Scale 0 1 2 3 Miles
Over several millennia the Archaic lifestyle evolved into the Woodland demographic system which was full-blown by about 3,000 years Before Present. Marking the Woodland Period (which has been divided by archeologists into Early, Middle, and Late stages) were significant subsistence, sociological, and technological developments which combined to constitute a cultural revolution among the Indians of eastern Virginia and along the entire Atlantic Coast of North America: the introduction of the bow and arrow, the manufacture of ceramic vessels for the preparation and storage of food, the advent of agriculture which provided staple food supplies, and the development of village life and tribal affiliations.\(^5\)

Extensive Woodland Period shell-midden sites are located along the Nansemond River at Barrel Point, Cedar Point, Ferry Point, Holladay's Point, Wilkerson's Landing, Reid's Ferry, Dumpling Island, Brady's Marina, Town Point, Newman's Point, Will's Cove, Sleepy Hole Point, and Glebe Point. Few of the sites, however, have been subjects of systematic archeological investigation.\(^6\)


Occupying the Nansemond River by A.D. 1600 were the Nansemond Indians, who were discovered in 1608 by Captain John Smith and described by him as "a proud warlike Nation." In his "Description of Virginia and Proceedings of the Colonie by Captain John Smith, 1612," Smith estimated that the Nansemonds had two hundred fighting men. While he did not estimate precisely the total population of the tribe, Turner has suggested that it might have been as many as 850 persons.

The Nansemonds, one of at least twenty-eight tribes comprising the Powhatan Empire in eastern Virginia, occupied several villages along the river which bears their name and farmed land adjacent to those villages for sustenance. In his "A True Relation, by Captain John Smith, 1608," Smith described the stream and its environs:

This river is a musket shot broad, [with] a narrow channel . . . [it courses] for eighteen miles, almost directly South, and by West where beginneth the first inhabitants: for a mile it turneth directly East; towards the West, a great bay, and a white chaukie Island [Dumpling Island, upon which an Indian shell midden is situated] . . . within a quarter of a mile,
the river divideth in two, the neck a plaine high Corne
field, the wester [bend] a highe plaine likewise. . . .
In these plaines are planted abundance of houses and
people; they may containe 1000. Acres of most excellent
fertill ground: so sweet, so pleasant, so beauti­
ful. . . .10

The Nansemond Indians were seated on Dumpling
Island, on which were situated a temple containing the
preserved remains of their kings and a structure in which
Powhatan stored weapons, furs, and foodstuffs exacted by
him as tribute from the member tribes of his empire in the
southeastern area of Tidewater Virginia. The Indians'
determination to defend their temple against desecration
and preserve their food against theft or forced trade by
the colonists proved formidable.

The first meeting of the English colonists and the
Nansemond Indians, in the spring of 1608, was congenial.
Captain John Smith reported that

The [Nansemond] King at our arrivall sent for me to
come unto him. I sent word what commodities I had to
exchange for wheat [corn], and if he would, as had the
rest of his Neighbours, conclude a Peace . . . [H]e
came downe before the Boate . . . [and] signified to
me to come a shore, and sent a Canow with foure or
five of his men. . . . The King wee presented with a
piece of Copper. . . . The King kindly feasted us,
requesting us to stay to trade till the next day.11

After the colonists returned to Jamestown, Smith
noted, "the King sent us a Hatchet which [the Nansemonds]
had stollen." The deliverer of the hatchet was "well
rewarded and contented."12

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., p. 63.
The colonists' second encounter with the Nansemonds, during the summer of 1608, was not so cordial. Smith recorded that, at the mouth of the Nansemond River, the settlers "espied six or seven Salvages making their wires [weirs, or nets]" and that the Indians fled. Soon, however, the Indians reappeared and "one of them desired us to goe to his house up that river, [and] into our Boat voluntarily he came. . . ." After sailing up the river seven or eight miles, the colonists saw "large Cornefields, in the midst a little Isle [Dumpling Island]; and in it was abundance of Corne. . . . Farre we went not ere seaven or eight Canowes full of men armed appeared following us. . . . Presently from each side of the river came arrowes so fast as two or three hundred could shoot them." In defense, the colonists "bestowed so many shot, . . . [that] our Muskets they found shot further then their Bowes. . . ." After the Indians "retyred behind the next trees," the colonists, led by Smith, began to destroy the natives' canoes at which time the Indians discarded their weapons, made "signes of peace," and provided the settlers as much corn as they could carry away. Smith added (ironically) that the colonists and Indians departed "good friends."

Smith provided no explanation of what might have

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provoked the Nansemonds to hostility. However, H. C. Rountree noted that

The English felt that when they bought a people's needed winter food supplies, any protests and resistances from the people constituted 'injuries' and 'abuses' while cooperation shown after the resistance had been forcibly put down was 'friendship.' . . . the English believed firmly in visitors' 'right to trade' with native people (even if those people were unwilling), and they also believed that the 'savages' were children at best and animals at worst.14

Neither the English nor the Indians learned much from the other, and both "let the tensions build up."15 The Nansemonds remained hostile to the English, and again would demonstrate that hostility in 1609, 1622, and 1644.

14 H. C. Rountree, "The Powhatan Indians of Virginia Through Four Centuries," unpublished manuscript in progress, p. 36.

15 Ibid., p. 37.
CHAPTER FOUR

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
SETTLERS, SETTLEMENTS, AND SOCIOLOGY

Throughout the seventeenth century, the Nansemond River and its shores offered resources to be exploited by European colonists. Its tidal waters, which sustained fish, crabs, and oysters, were navigable for travel and trade; land along its banks was fertile and suitable for the growth of a variety of crops; and marshes and forests along its shores supported many species of edible mammals and birds.

Because of the lack of a money crop, its distance from Jamestown, and the presence of the Nansemond Indians who posed a threat to colonists, the Nansemond River was not settled until the late 1620s. It was not until the 1630s that Englishmen began to secure land patents and to establish farms and wharves at places suitable for agriculture and maritime trade.

The first attempted settlement on the Nansemond River, in 1609, ended in failure. Captain John Smith, who had emerged as President of the Virginia colony, dispersed the Jamestown settlers because of potential shortages of food during the impending winter of 1609-10.
One hundred and twenty men under Captain Francis West were sent to establish a settlement at the falls of the James River (at present Richmond, Virginia) and sixty others, led by Captain John Martin and George Percy, were dispatched to set up an outpost on the Nansemond. Lieutenant Michael Sicklemore and a small group of colonists preceded Martin and Percy who, upon their arrival, could not find them. Inquiries were made of the Nansemond Indians, "butt they accordinge to their subtelltyes wold not acquaynte us therewith." After a "nighte . . . stormy and wette," Percy found the men "by goode fyers in Saffety."^1

Two messengers then were sent to the king of the Nansemonds "To Barter wth him for an Island [Dumpling Island] . . . for Copper hatchets and other comodeties. . . . And we never sett eye upon our Messengers after." The messengers had been "sacrifysed [by the Indians, and] . . . their Braynes weare cutt and skraped out of their heads wth mussell shelles." In retaliation, the English "Beate the Salvages out of the Island burned their houses Ransaked their Temples Tooke downe the Corpes of their deade kings . . . And caryed away their pearles Copper and braceletts, wherew th they doe decore their kings funeralles."^2

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^1George Percy, "A Trewel Relacyon of the Pro-ceedinge and Ocurrentes of Momente wch have hapned in Virginia," Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine 3 (April 1922):262.

^2Ibid., pp. 262-63.
After taking as hostages the son of the Nansemond king (who soon was released) and another Indian (who escaped after having been wounded accidentally by a pistol shot), Martin declined to make any further attempt to occupy the area. Despite the presence of a "great store of Indian maize" that, according to Percy, could have been seized, Martin returned to Jamestown "pretendinge thatt he wolde not putt his men into hassard and danger."  

Captain John Martin's responsibility for the failure of the 1609 settlement of the Nansemond River has been the subject of debate by historians. Martin, said Conway Whittle Sams, "was a brave and determined man . . . [his] settlement might have fared better had it not been for [Captain John] Smith's brutal treatment of [the Nansemond Indians] not long before. The remembrance of it made [the Indians] wreak their vengeance on the next white people to arrive." Philip L. Barbour viewed the matter contrarily, and stated that "the colony had to be organized for the winter . . . . At Nansemond there were troubles from the start." Martin, Barbour contended, "was less patient with [the Indians] than Smith or [his] patience was more severely tried . . . but the result was that an island had to be occupied by force, and woeful destruction visited on the Indians." Trade with the Nansemonds was

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3Ibid., p. 263.

impossible and, Barbour concluded, the "settlement had to be abandoned."\(^5\)

The winter of 1609-10, for which Smith had attempted to prepare, nearly devastated the poorly provisioned Jamestown colonists. That winter, the "Starving Time," was survived only by about "sixtie men, women, and children, most miserable and poore creatures," of the five hundred who lived in the colony the preceding fall. So harsh were conditions during the Starving Time "that a Salvage we slew and buried, the poorer sort tooke him up againe and eat [ate] him. . . . And one amongst the rest did kill his wife, powdered [salted] her, and had eaten part of her . . . for which hee was executed," stated Smith, who added in a tone of humor, that "whether shee was better roasted, boyled, or carbondo'd, I know not, but of such a dish as powdered wife I never heard. . . ."\(^6\)

On May 19, 1610 Sir Thomas Dale arrived at Jamestown with three hundred colonists "drawn from the better class of working men [who] had been meticulously selected . . . with a view to their ability to survive in the New World." Having been appointed Deputy Governor of Virginia, Dale was "stern [and] puritanical . . . for he subjected to


military discipline all under his command." Under his administration, the colony began to prosper: land was seized from the Indians, the "town" of Henrico was established on the James River near the Fall Line, and colonists were able to devote attention and energy to the production of "bumper crops."  

The Nansemond Indians, since 1609 ignored but not forgotten, were the objects of a punitive expedition under the direction of Governor Dale in July 1611. George Percy recorded that

Dale wente againste the Nancemondies wth a hundrethe men in Armour. . . . Capte: Francis Weste was shott into the Thyghe and Captaine [John] Martin in the Arme. Sir Tho: Dale himselfe narrowly eskapeinge for An arrow light, juste upon the edge or Brimme of his headepiece. . . . In theis Conflicttts many Indyans beinge also slayne and wounded . . . our men Cutt downe their Corne Burned their howses and besydes those wth they had slayne browghtt some of them prisoners to our foarte.  

A forced state of harmony between the Nansemonds, and their Algonquian fellows, and the English was secured by the marriage of Pocahontas, a daughter of Powhatan, to John Rolfe at Jamestown on April 5, 1614. The wedding of the baptized Pocahontas, who had "renounced publickly her countrey Idolatry, [and] openly confessed her Christian faith," to Rolfe, "a gentleman of approved behaviour and

7Alf J. Mapp, Jr., The Virginia Experiment: The Old Dominion's Role in the Making of America, 1607-1781 (Richmond, Va.: The Dietz Press, Inc., 1957), pp. 29-32.  
8Percy, p. 279.  
honest carriage," was considered to be "an other knot to binde this peace the stronger." The "interracial marriage did not end hostilities . . . [but] there is no doubt of its relieving some of the tension between the Indians and the English for some years." Peace between the Indians and colonists was strained by the deaths of Pocahontas in March 1617, and Powhatan in April 1618. It was maintained by Itopatin (also known as Opitchapan), Powhatan's brother and successor as administrator of the Algonquian Indian empire in eastern Virginia. Itopatin was "a much weaker man and leader than Powhatan" and, in 1619, was overshadowed by Opechancanough who attempted to exterminate the colonists who "threatened the entire native society." In 1622 approximately 3500 colonists lived in Virginia. Many had been attracted by "the successful development and effective marketing of tobacco . . . [which]

12 Barbour, Pocahontas and Her World, pp. 181-89.
13 Ibid., p. 189.
14 Bridenbaugh, p. 28.
produced a boom during the 1620's." During the period 1617-1619 plantations developed and "did much to populate the James River basin as far as the falls." 

March 22, 1622, was a fateful day in Virginia. To the Christian colonists, it was Good Friday; to the Indians, it was the day the colonists were to be annihilated. With "the Country setled in such a firme peace . . . [and] The poore weake Salvages being every way bettered," the settlers had welcomed Indians to their homes where they "were alwaies friendly fed at their tables, and lodged in their bed-chambers." On Good Friday, 1622, the English were visited by unarmed Indians who brought "Deere, Turkies, Fish, Fruits, and other provisions." 

Suddenly, as planned by Opechancanough, the Indians fell upon the English in a concerted, colony-wide massacre. "With their owne tools" the settlers were slain by the Indians, who did not spare "either age or sex, man woman or childe." Three hundred forty-seven persons were killed, "most by their owne weapons." Not content in having 

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17 Charles E. Hatch, Jr., The First Seventeen Years: Virginia, 1607-1624 (Williamsburg: The Virginia 350th Anniversary Celebration Corporation, 1957), p. 34.


19 Ibid.
wrought death, the Indians "fell againe upon the dead bodies . . . defacing, dragging, and mangling" them.  

Lieutenant Edward Waters (who had arrived in Virginia in 1610) and his wife, Grace O'Neil (who had come to the colony in 1618), were captured by the Nansemond Indians during the massacre of 1622. Waters and his wife

these Nandsamunds [Nansemonds] kept Prisoners till it chanced they [the Indians] found this Boat [an English boat which had washed ashore]; at which purchase they so rejoiced, according to their custome of triumph, with songs, dances, and invocations. They were so busied, that Waters and his wife found opportunity to get secretly into their [the Indians'] canow, and so crossed the River to Kecoughtan . . . whereat the English no lesse wondred and rejoiced, then the Salvages were madded with discontent.

The circumstances of the capture of Waters and his wife have not been determined. They had settled one hundred acres near Blount Point, in present Newport News, Virginia, and initially had been listed among those murdered during the Massacre of 1622.

The colonists, shocked by the Massacre, made explanations for the decimation brought upon them by the

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20 Ibid., p. 145.


22 Ibid., p. 347.


24 Jester, p. 347.
Indians. In 1623 the Virginia General Assembly gave full approval of reasons including that

the Handes of Godd sett against us . . . for the punishment of our ingratitude in not being thankfull. . . . Justly likewise were we punished for our greedy desires of present gaine and profit . . . we being too secure in trustinge of a treacherous enimie, the Salvages. . . .

Reprisals against the Indians were not delayed as long as the explanations of the causes of the massacre, for in the fall of 1622 an expedition led by Sir George Yeardley "drove out the Nansemonds and Warrascoyacks, burned their houses, and took their corn." By letter dated January 20, 1623, the Council of Virginia advised the London Company that

Wee have anticipated your desires by setting uppon the Indyans in all places. . . . Sir George yardley uppon ye Wyanokes and in a seconde expeditions upon the Nancemunds [Nansemonds] . . . [At those] places we have slaine divers, burnt theire Townes, destroyde theire Wears [weirs] & corne . . . we will Constantlie pursue their extirpations . . . [for] we have slayne more of them this yeere, then hath been slayne before since the begininge of ye Colonie.

The Nansemond Indians were specific subjects of colonial retaliation. Robert Bennett, of "Bennett's Welcome" (near present Smithfield, Virginia, on the James River), on


June 9, 1623, wrote to his brother, Edward, of having received from Europe "exclent good wynes . . . jarse of oyle . . . Allmondes . . . Olives . . . [and] Candells," and added that "We purpose god willinge after we have wedid or Tobaco and corne . . . to goe upon the . . . Nansemomes to cut down ther corne and put them to the sorde." On August 2, 1623, a force under Captain William Tucker attacked and killed "many" of the Nansemonds, destroyed their crops, and burned their houses and, a week later, attacked the Nansemonds a second time.²⁹

Expeditions against the Indians were successful, for the Governor's Council wrote the London Company on January 30, 1624, that "Wee have to our uttermost abilities revenged ourselves uppone the Salvages . . . and with the slaughter of many enforced them to abandone their plantations."³⁰ The Massacre of 1622, its effects, and its aftermath were not forgotten by the colonists for, on August 8, 1626, the Governor and Council "ordered" that March 22 "be yeerly Solemnized as [a] holydaye"³¹ and even three years later, on October 16, 1629, the General Assembly ordered that Indian lands between the Nansemond River and the Chesapeake Bay be

²⁸Ibid., pp. 220, 222.
²⁹Tyler, pp. 206-7.
³⁰Kingsbury, p. 450.
marched upon during summer and winter of each year. Nor did the colonists forget Opechcananough, the perpetrator of the Massacre, upon whose head "a price was set."

Settlement of the James River and its tributaries during the first half of the seventeenth century was influenced by economic conditions relating to the price of tobacco. Tobacco prices were high during the 1620s, but declined by 1630. By the mid-1630s tobacco prices increased and were a factor in attracting settlers to the James River basin.

Settlement of the Nansemond River was affected by the economy of the 1630s, when a total of 1,614 acres was patented by Francis Hough, Peter Knight, Epaphroditus Lawson, Humphry Scoen, and William Parker. Among the most prominent colonists of the Nansemond was Richard Bennett, to whom "2,000 acres on Nansemond River ... said land being a neck, having on the one side the river and on the other side a creek [Bennett's Creek], beginning three miles up the said creek" were granted on June 26, 1635. (Figure 3)

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32 McIlwaine, Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1619-1658/59, pp. 52-53.
33 Bridenbaugh, p. 32.
34 Kelly, p. 192.
Richard Bennett, the nephew of Robert Bennett of "Bennett's Welcome" in present Isle of Wight County, Virginia had arrived in Virginia by 1629, for he served in the House of Burgesses during that year. His grant, in 1635, of 2,000 acres along the Nansemond River was "due for the importation [into Virginia] of forty persons" including his wife and "Aught. neger," who was "the first member of [the Negro] race officially recorded as entering the district."

By 1641 Bennett had remarried to Ann (Marian) Utie, the widow of John Utie, who had arrived in Virginia aboard the Seaflower sometime after 1623. Three children were born to the marriage.

Richard Bennett served in the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1629 and 1631, as a commissioner (Justice of the Peace) for Warrasquoicke (Isle of Wight County), and was a member of the Governor's Council from 1642 to 1649.

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40 Jester, pp. 339-42.

He was also one of the first [religious] Independents in Nansemond county,\(^{42}\) having espoused the tenets of Puritanism.\(^{43}\)

In 1642 Bennett dispatched his brother, Robert, to New England with the request that Puritan ministers be sent "to administer to the spiritual wants of the Puritan non-conformists" in Virginia.\(^{44}\) The Puritan ministers were "well received," and held services in "private houses."\(^{45}\)

Bennett, who remained loyal to the "Parliamentarian movement in England and America,"\(^{46}\) and who managed "to keep in some sort of conformity with the Church of England, for Puritanism did not necessarily mean Congregationalism, or severance from the Church,"\(^{47}\) served as a commissioner of the "Councill of State" and was a signer of the Articles at the Surrender of the Countrie [Virginia] to Puritan authority in England on March 12, 1652.\(^{48}\) On April 30, 1652,


\(^{44}\)Ibid.; and McKnight, p. 141.

\(^{45}\)Mason, p. 53.

\(^{46}\)McKnight, p. 141.

\(^{47}\)Tyler, p. 211.

After long and serious debate and advice . . . it was unanimously voted and concluded, by the commis­sioners appointed here by authority of parliament and by all of the Burgesses [of Virginia] . . . that Mr Richard Bennett, Esq. be Governour for this ensuing yeare, or until the next meeting of the Assembly, with all the just powers and authorities that may belong to that place lawfully. . . .

Bennett, who served as Governor of Virginia until March 1655, was a member of the Governor's Council from April 1658, until his death in 1676. In 1672 he was converted to the creed of the Society of Friends (Quakers) by George Fox, the founder of the Society, who "At Nanse­mond . . . had a great meeting . . . [attended by people] who were much taken with the Truth declared." Despite his Puritan and Quaker persuasions, Bennett held allegiance to the established church for, in his will dated March 15, 1674, and probated August 3, 1676, he designated that

I, Richard Bennett, of Nansemond River in Virginia . . . give and bequest unto the Parish where I now live and have so long lived . . . three hundred acres more or less. . . . The rents & profits thereof to be re­ceived yearly by the Churchwardens of this parish [parish] and by them disposed of towards the releife of four poor aged or impotent persons whom they Judge to stand in most need of help. . . .

Settlement of the Nansemond and other rivers in

49 Ibid., p. 82.
51 Boddie, p. 76.
Tidewater Virginia during the 1630s and 1640s resulted in the displacement of the Indians who occupied land along those streams. In 1644 the Indians, who "resented the Incroachments . . . laid the Ground-work of another Massacre; wherein by Surprize they cut off [killed] near Five Hundred" colonists.54

The Indian Massacre of 1644, like that of 1622, was planned and ordered by Opechancanough. By 1644 he had

by his great Age, and the Fatigues of War . . . grown so decrepit, that he was not able to walk alone; but was carried about by his Men . . . . His flesh was all macerated, his Sinews slacken'd, and his Eye-lids became so heavy, that he could not see, but as they were lifted up by his Servants.55

Opechancanough was captured by the English in 1646 and imprisoned at Jamestown, where "he was treated with all the Respect and Tenderness imaginable."56 In 1622 "a price [had been] set upon Opechancanough's head,"57 and in 1646 one of his guards "basely shot him thro' the Back . . . of which Wound he died."58

Plans for colonial reprisal against the Indians were expressed in precise terms. On July 1, 1644, the Virginia Assembly resolved that

55 Ibid., p. 62.
56 Ibid.
57 Bridenbaugh, p. 32.
58 Beverley, p. 62.
Whereas the Indians have justly made themselves our Irreconcilable enemies by the late Bloody Massacre... we will forever abandon all forms of peace... and will to the utmost of our power pursue and root [them] out.59

The Nansemond Indians, whose "town" site was patented by William Brook in 1643,60 were mentioned specifically in those plans. The Assembly, on July 1, 1644, ordained and enacted that... utmost endeavors [be used] to cut down Indians corn generally this summer... [and that] a sufficient company of men [would] go against their neighboring Indians the Nansemonds... on the eighth day of July.61

After 1646 the Nansemonds moved to the south and clashed with the exiled Weyanokes. In 1670 their population included forty-five "Bowmen or Hunters," and in 1677 they signed the "Treaty Between Virginia and the Indians."62 The Nansemonds maintained their autonomy until the middle of the eighteenth century, when they merged with the Iroquoian Nottoways.

The Nansemond River was incorporated into Elizabeth City Shire in 1634 and into Upper Norfolk County in 1637. In March 1646, Upper Norfolk County was renamed Nansemond County.63


60Nugent, pp. 153-54.


63McKnight, p. 138.
The Church of England, the official church in colonial Virginia, was represented and, to some degree, established during the first years of settlement of the Nansemond River for, on June 3, 1635, George White, a "minister," was granted two hundred acres "North on Nansemond River." In 1637 White, a "Minister of the word of God," was paid for conducting religious services in Lower Norfolk County.

In March 1643, Nansemond (then Upper Norfolk) County was divided into three parishes: South, East, and West, which became known, respectively, as Upper, Lower, and Chuckatuck parishes. The Upper parish encompassed the headwaters of the Nansemond River, the Lower parish bordered the right (east) bank of the river, and the Chuckatuck Parish bordered the left (west) bank of the stream. Since churches were not mentioned in the legislation establishing the parishes, the "earliest [religious] services were undoubtedly held in private houses."

Churches are believed to have been built in each parish "soon" after 1643. The church in the Lower

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66 Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.

67 Mason, p. 38.
parish may have been constructed on Glebe land, near the present community of Driver, "as was customary in early colonial times," and that in Chuckatuck parish may have stood "just beyond the entrance" of present St. John's Church at Holladay's Point on the Nansemond River.

Not all settlers of the Nansemond River subscribed to the tenets of the Anglican Church. Dissenters, Puritans and Quakers, made "Nansemond county one of the early centers of independent religion in . . . Virginia." Because of the "fanatical zeal" of the Quakers, the General Assembly ordered on September 10, 1663, that the Nansemond County Court, the vestry of Chuckatuck parish, and "Some Quakers . . . that under pretence of marriage, Lived unlawfully together in fornication" be fined.

About 1672, Quakers established a meeting house near Chuckatuck. They were tolerated by the colonial authorities, whose duty was "to protect the Established Church against dissent and schism," as long as they did not conspire to oppose the laws of Virginia. After

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68 Ibid., p. 42.
70 Mason, p. 53.
71 Ibid.
72 Hall, pp. xxvi-xxvii.
73 Bruce, 1:215.
74 Hall, p. xxvii.
"being Informed that their are Severall Conventicles in Nansemond County," the General Court ordered on June 16, 1675, that if their be any meeting in this Country that . . . be proceeded Against . . . the laws [of] England and this Country, Colonel Bridger [a member of the Governor's Council] is desired strictly to Comd the Justices of nansemond, Lower norfolk & Isle of Wight Counties to make Strict Enquiry . . . and if any Persons shall be found to meete . . . they be Proceeded Against. . . .

Undaunted by edicts and not "Proceeded Against," Quakers continued to reside and meet in Nansemond County during the seventeenth century. In 1702 they constructed meeting houses, "small frame structures of the plainest character," at two sites along the Nansemond River.

The political structure and social order of Virginia were jeopardized by Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. Led by Nathaniel Bacon, Jr., who had settled at Curles Neck on the James River in present Henrico County, Virginia, and who had been appointed to the Council of State (Governor's Council), the rebellion was precipitated by fears of Indian attacks, low prices for tobacco, and, perhaps, by Bacon's "aim of total subversion of the government," and was a

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75 McIlwaine, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, p. 410.
76 Mason, p. 54.
78 Wertenbaker, pp. 5, 10.
test of the authority and policies of Governor Sir William Berkeley.

"'Here, shoot me, 'fore God, fair mark, shoot,'" exclaimed Governor Berkeley to Nathaniel Bacon during their confrontation at Jamestown. Bacon assured him "that he would not hurt a hair on his head," in that he and his followers sought only "a commission to save their lives from the Indians." With the commission forced from the Governor, Bacon wrote in a letter dated September 17, 1676, that "the people come in from all parts most bravely, and we are informed that multitudes are for us in the [counties of] Isle of Wight and Nancymond, and only await orders." Bacon's Rebellion, a short-lived challenge to royal authority, ended upon the death of its leader, of dysentery, on October 26, 1676. Its effects were significant, for Governor Berkeley was recalled and replaced by Lieutenant Governor Herbert Jeffreys, and commissioners were sent to Virginia in 1677 "to inquire into the peoples' grievances."

The people of Nansemond County provided a list of twenty-two grievances or complaints. Among the grievances

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79 Ibid., p. 27.


81 Wertenbaker, p. 43.

82 Ibid., p. 53.

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were that acts of the assembly had not been confirmed, that arms had been confiscated, that restitution was not provided for confiscated arms, and that citizens were not provided accounts of tax collections and expenditures. While the Commissioners considered the grievances, "fower companies of Souldiers" were quartered at Kicotan (Hampton) and Middle Plantation (Williamsburg) and in New Kent and Nansemond Counties for the purpose of maintaining order in the colony.

The protection of the inhabitants of Virginia and those vessels which traded with them were of concern to the General Assembly which, on September 19, 1667, enacted legislation for the construction of forts on the Potomac, Rappahannock, York, James, and Nansemond Rivers. In 1689 only the platform for the Nansemond fort had been completed and, in 1690, ordnance there was "entirely exposed to capture by a foreign enemy." By 1695 the fort was "maintained," if not completed, for "James Peters was paid forty-seven pounds sterling for building carriages for the heavy guns . . . and also for throwing up an earthwork there." During the last quarter of the seventeenth century the population of Nansemond County stabilized at approxi-

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83 Neville, pp. 364-67.
84 Ibid., p. 30.
85 W. W. Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, 13 vols. (Richmond, Va.: 1809-1823), 2:56.
86 Bruce, 2:166, 173.
mately eight hundred persons, most of whom probably lived along the Nansemond River, Bennett's Creek, and Chuckatuck Creek. An undetermined number of slaves were among the population.

The number of inhabitants of Nansemond, as of the other nineteen counties of Virginia, resulted in the Act for Co-habitation and Encouragement of Trade and Manufacture on June 23, 1680, which provided for the establishment of towns and storehouses. "In Nanzemond County" a town was to be "att coll. [colonel] Dues point als [also called] Huffs point," and the General Assembly, on November 10, 1682, levied on Nansemond County the payment of 540 pounds of tobacco "for laying out ye towne."

The act was repealed and succeeded in April 1691, by the Act for Establishing Ports and Markets which "resulted in establishment of a port and market 'at Huffes Point,'" now called Town Point, on the Nansemond River. In October 1705, a third act provided for fair days, market days, and trade with Indians.

Settlers of the Nansemond River conformed to "a

87 Morgan, p. 412.
88 Ibid.
89 Whichard, 1:257.
90 Hening, 2:472.
92 McKnight, p. 146.
clearly defined social order" by the end of the seventeenth century. They were represented in the House of Burgesses in 1654-1655 and 1659 by Thomas Godwin, who had arrived in Virginia prior to 1650 and had patented 379 acres of land in the county between 1656 and 1668. Godwin served as Speaker of the House of Burgesses in 1676.  

Thomas Milner was elected Burgess from Nansemond County in 1682, but resigned his seat in order to serve as Clerk of the House of Burgesses through 1684. In 1688 he was re-elected to the House, served as chairman of its Election Returns Committee and Committee for Propositions and Grievances, and was the Speaker of the House during 1691-1692 and 1693. Prior to his death in 1694, Milner was a Trustee of the College of William and Mary.  

In 1698 John Keeton was certified as an elected Burgess from Nansemond County. "Later it was brought to the attention of the House that Mr. Keeton was a foreigner," and, thus, not qualified for membership. But Keeton had been naturalized under the provisions of a 1679 Act of Assembly and was found entitled to represent Nansemond with

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95Ibid., pp. 86-89.
"all the privileges relating to this Colony which a native of England or this government hath." 96

Seven hundred eighty-one persons lived in Nansemond County in 1699, 97 an appreciable number along the shores of the Nansemond River, with representatives in the House of Burgesses. 98 They farmed above its shores and conducted maritime trade at wharves along its banks. They established, attended, and were served by churches at Chuckatuck and Driver.

The seventeenth-century settlers of the Nansemond River established themselves in a strange land. They braved the hostilities of Indians, developed farms, participated in government and religious activities and left their names at such localities as Newman's Point, Hough's Point, Wilkerson's Landing, Holladay's Point, Bennett's Pasture, and Godwin's Wharf.


97 Morgan, p. 412.

CHAPTER FIVE

ARCHIVES AND ARCHEOLOGY

History is recorded in documents—letters, diaries, journals, books, and government records, among others. Documents do not always provide historians with as much information as they would like to have, however. The meanings of words and phrases have changed over the centuries, official records are often incomplete, and people sometimes conveyed messages with meanings now hidden to the historian.

Historical archeology, which does not attempt to fill in all the missing pieces of the puzzles of history, "can add to our understanding . . . in a unique way, by looking not at the written record alone but at the almost countless objects left behind . . . [by people] capable of recording their own history."¹ The purpose of historical archeology is to supplement written records through the excavation, analysis, and interpretation of material remains.

significant historical features for archeological investi-
gation, for "each represents a time capsule left behind from
a specific moment in history." The artifacts contained
within them provide insights into colonial life and indus-
try, for among them are objects that would not have come to
be treasured or preserved as heirlooms or antiques.

Four trash pits containing seventeenth-century
artifacts have been excavated at sites along the Nansemond
River. Although the artifacts found within them are not on
the order of the "wonderful things" discovered in the Tomb
of Tutankhamen, they are important clues to colonial
culture.

The Suffolk By-pass Trash Pit, on the west bank of
the Nansemond River near Reid's Ferry, yielded fragments of
bricks and mortar, a dozen nails, the bones of deer, fish,
and a bird, oyster shells, fragments of Indian pottery,
broken clay tobacco pipes, half of a clay milk bowl, and a
small fragment of blue Delftware of European manufacture.
The tobacco pipes and milk bowl were of local clay and,
possibly, were made at Jamestown. Faunal remains indicate

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a diet based on wild species. "All of the evidence" indicated that the trash pit dated around "the middle of the 17th Century." 

Two trash pits at Wills Cove, on the east bank of the Nansemond River near the community of Driver, were excavated in the fall of 1978. Situated on land patented by Richard Bennett in 1635, the trash pits dated from 1645-1665 and 1650-1680, and contained artifacts of both local and European manufacture.

The first Wills Cove trash pit contained a high percentage of locally made artifacts. Included were tobacco pipes and fragments of "coarseware" storage jars, cups, tankards, and jugs, and a clay marble.

In the second trash pit at Wills Cove were more items of European manufacture. Included were fragments of clay tobacco pipes, Staffordshire tankards, Delftware plates, Iberian storage jars, English wine bottles, and Dutch bricks and case bottles (gin bottles). The most significant artifacts from the second refuse deposit were two ceramic drinking vessels; both were made either in Surrey or Hampshire, England, and were the first to be discovered at a seventeenth-century site in Virginia.

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6 Edward Bottoms, "The History and Archeology of Wills Cove, Suffolk, Virginia" (Research paper).

7 Ibid.
Figure 4
Sites with Seventeenth-Century Archeological Components
Nansemond River, Virginia
Analysis of the faunal remains from the two Wills Cove trash pits revealed that during the period 1645-1665 emphasis was placed on the procurement of wild animals for food. The remains of sixteen wild species and three domesticated species were encountered in pit number one. The domesticated species (cattle, swine, and sheep) constituted 79.36% of the total food supply among the remains in the first pit. In the second pit cattle, swine, and sheep accounted for 90.60% of the food supply, with wild faunal forms constituting only 9.40%.  

The contents of the Wills Cove trash pits indicated significant changes in subsistence and culture by the inhabitants of the site during a short period of time. Between 1645 and 1680 the colonists came to depend less on locally made ceramic items and more upon imported ceramics of better quality. At the same time, domesticated animals contributed more to their food supply.

The Schooner Cove trash pit, near Sleepy Hole Point on the east bank of the Nansemond River, contained artifacts dating from the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. Found in the pit were English clay tobacco pipes, fragmentary wine bottles, a North Devon sgraffito (scratchware) pitcher, a glazed stoneware jug, a Burslem stoneware mug, a Rhenishware mug, an iron two-tined fork, a table knife, a phleem (blood-letting knife), and a jew's harp. None of the Artifacts was of

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local manufacture, thus indicating a dependence upon European sources for household, occupational, and recreational items.\(^9\)

While the phleem might have been used for veterinary purposes, it could have been employed in treating human maladies. The jew's harp, identical to those excavated at Jamestown, suggests leisure-time recreational activity.\(^10\)

Oyster shells were present in each of the trash pits excavated along the Nansemond River. It cannot be determined if oysters were eaten of necessity or were considered a delicacy. However, as Audrey Noel Hume pointed out, "No archaeologist working on domestic sites in the coastal areas of Virginia can fail to be aware of the important part played by oysters in the diet of both the rich and poor."\(^11\)

The Copeland Spoon, which bears "the sole surviving [touch] mark of an American pewterer of the seventeenth century,"\(^12\) was discovered during archeological excavations at Jamestown. Considered to be "the most important spoon in the Jamestown collection, and one of the most signifi-


\(^12\)Worth Bailey, "Joseph Copeland, 17th-Century Pewterer," Antiques 33 (April 1938):188.
cant objects unearthed [there]," it bears a touchmark (or maker's mark) reading: IOSEPH COPELAND/1675/CHUCKATUCK.¹³

The spoon is of historical importance, for it establishes that Copeland was practicing his occupation at Chuckatuck, near the west bank of the Nansemond River, in 1675. Little is known of Copeland except that he served as caretaker of the Statehouse at Jamestown from 1688 to 1691.¹⁴ The as yet undiscovered site of Copeland's pewter shop at Chuckatuck holds both archeological and historical potential.

Sites with uninvestigated seventeenth-century artifactual components have been exposed by agricultural activity and construction projects along the Nansemond River during the past decade. They are located at Cedar Point, Wilkerson's Landing, Shell Island, Ferry Point, Town Point (Hough's Point), Newman's Point, and Glebe Point. Archeological excavation, combined with historical research, will provide important information on the Nansemond River and its seventeenth-century settlers.

¹³Cotter and Hudson, pp. 33-34.
¹⁴Ibid., p. 34; and Bailey, p. 189.
CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Nansemond River, an estuarine stream in southeastern Virginia, its immediate environs--marshes, forests, and fields--and their vegetal and faunal resources have attracted human inhabitants for at least twelve thousand years. Indians, colonists, farmers and fishermen, artisans and villagers and, now, suburbanites, have found the tidal stream appealing and sustaining.

Paleo-Indians established campsites at Holladay's Point on the west bank of the Nansemond River during the close of the Pleistocene Epoch. Other sites along the shores of the river were occupied intensively by Indians during the Archaic Period (ca. 9,000-3,000 years ago) and Woodland Period (ca. 3,000-380 years ago). In 1607, when English colonists arrived in Virginia, land along the river was held by the Nansemond Indians, members of the Algonquian Powhatan Empire.

Colonization of the Nansemond River by the English, first attempted in 1609, was delayed because of Indian hostility until the 1620s and 1630s. Land along the river was occupied by settlers by 1640.

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Colonists of the Nansemond River included Anglicans, Puritans, and Quakers. Anglican churches were established at the communities of Chuckatuck and Driver about 1643. Puritan services were held along the stream during the 1640s and 1650s, and Quaker meetings were conducted from about 1660 until after 1700.

Richard Bennett, one of the more prominent settlers of the Nansemond River, brought forty colonists to Virginia including the first Negro in the lower Tidewater area. Bennett served as Governor of Virginia while Oliver Cromwell ruled England and bequeathed land to the Anglican church for the relief of the poor and aged along the Nansemond.

Settlers of the Nansemond River, which was incorporated into Nansemond County in 1646, conformed to a socio-political system which included participation in county and colonial government. They served as county officials, members of the militia, and in the Virginia House of Burgesses.

Some of the Nansemond settlers supported Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. After the rebellion they submitted for resolution a list of twenty-two grievances against royal colonial policy.

During the last quarter of the seventeenth century eight hundred persons lived in Nansemond County, most of them along the Nansemond River. Legislation in 1667 and 1680 provided for the construction of a fort and a town on
the river for the protection and economic benefit of its inhabitants.

The records of the Nansemond County Court were destroyed by fire in 1734, 1779, and 1866. In the absence of those records, which would have been invaluable for historical research, archeological investigations have provided supplemental information on the culture of seventeenth-century settlers of the Nansemond River. Archeological evidence indicates that between 1650 and 1680 colonists came to depend less upon native foods and locally manufactured household items and more upon domesticated animals and imported goods.

The Nansemond River rises and ebbs as it has for thousands of years. It played an important role in the prehistory and history of Virginia. Historical research combined with archeological investigations will add new chapters to its story.
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B. Articles


