Day 3

**Main Point Reading**

**A Short History of Jamestown**

The site for Jamestown was picked for several reasons, all of which met criteria the Virginia Company, who founded the settlement, said to follow in picking a spot for the settlement. The site was surrounded by water on three sides (it was not fully an island yet) and was far inland; both meant it was easily defensible against possible Spanish attacks. The water was also deep enough that the English could tie their ships at the shoreline - good parking! The site was also not inhabited by the Native population.

By June 15, the fort was completed. It was triangle shaped with a bulwark at each corner, holding four or five pieces of artillery. The settlers were now protected against any attacks that might occur from the local Powhatan Indians, whose hunting land they were living on. Relations had already been mixed between the newcomers and the Powhatan Indians. On June 22, Captain Newport left for England to get more supplies for the new settlement.

Not long after Captain Newport left, the settlers began to succumb to a variety of diseases. They were drinking water from the salty or slimy river, which was one of several things that caused the death of many. The death tolls were high. They were dying from swellings, fluxes, fevers, by famine, and sometimes by wars. Food was running low, though then Chief Powhatan starting to send gifts of food to help the English. If not for the Powhatan Indians help in the early years, the settlement would most likely have failed, as the English would have died from the various diseases or simply starved.

By late 1609, the relationship between the Powhatan Indians and the English had soured as the English were demanding too much food during a drought. That winter of 1609-10 is known as the "Starving Time." During that winter the English were afraid to leave the fort, due to a legitimate fear of being killed by the Powhatan Indians. As a result they ate anything they could: various animals, leather from their shoes and belts, and sometimes fellow settlers who had already died. By early 1610 most of the settlers, 80-90% according to William Strachey, had died due to starvation and disease.

Peace between the Powhatan Indians and the English, brought about by the conversion and marriage of Pocahontas (kidnapped by the English in 1613) and John Rolfe in 1614, ended in 1622. In March of that year the paramount chief, then Opechancanough, planned a coordinated attack against the English settlements. He was tired of the English encroachment on Powhatan lands. Jamestown escaped being attacked, due to a warning from a Powhatan boy living with the English. During the attack 350-400 of the 1,200 settlers were killed. After the attack, the Powhatan Indians withdrew, as was their way, and waited for the English to learn their lesson or pack up and leave. Once the English regrouped they retaliated and there was fighting between the two peoples for ten years, until a tenuous peace was reached in 1632.

Today, Jamestown Island is a historic site, though there is still a private residence on the island. It is preserved by the National Park Service and Preservation Virginia for visitors to learn about the importance of Jamestown and what was born out of its being the first permanent English settlement in North America.