

John Smith's Account of being Rescued by Pocahontas From his 1624 *General History of Virginia*

This source should be read in conjunction with chapter 3 of Camilla Townsend's *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma*. It is important to note that Smith's original account of his 1607 capture by the Powhatan Indians did not include this rescue story. He recorded this story for the first time in 1624, several years after Pocahontas died in 1617. The original spellings have been retained in the first paragraph; the rest of the text has been modernized. —D. Voelker

[1] Smith . . . being got to the marshes at the rivers head, twentie myles in the desert, had his two men slaine (as is supposed) sleping by the Canowe, whilst himselfe by fowling sought them victuall: who finding he was beset with 200 Salvages, two of them hee slew still defending himselfe with the ayd of a Salvage his guid, whom he bound to his arme with his garters, and vsed him as a buckler, yet he was shot in his thikh a little, and had many arrowes that stucke in his cloathes but no great hurt, till at last they tooke him prisoner.

[2] When this news came to Jamestown, much was their sorrow for his loss, few expecting what ensued. Six or seven weeks those Barbarians kept him prisoner, many strange triumphs and conjurations they made of him, yet he so demeaned himself amongst them, as he not only diverted them from surprising the Fort, but procured his own liberty, and got himself and his company such estimation amongst them, that those Savages admired him more than their own Quiyouckosucks.

[3] At last they brought him to Meronocomoco, where was Powhatan their Emperor. Here more than two hundred of those grim Courtiers stood wondering at him, as he had been a monster; till Powhatan and his train had put themselves in their greatest braveries. Before a fire upon a seat like a bedstead, he sat covered with a great robe, made of raccoon skins, and all the tails hanging by. On either hand did sit a young wench of 15 or 18 years, and along on each side the house, two rows of men, and behind them as many women, with all their heads and shoulders painted red: many of their heads bedecked with the white down of Birds; but every one with something: and a great chain of white beads about their necks.

[4] At his entrance before the king, all the people gave a great shout. The Queene of Appamatuck was appointed to bring him water to wash his hands, and another brought him a bunch of feathers, instead of a towel to dry them: having feasted him after their best barbarous manner they could, a long consultation was held, but the conclusion was, two great stones were brought before Powhatan; then as many as could laid hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs, to beat out his brains, Pocahontas, the King's dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevail, got his head in her arms, and laid her own [head] upon his to save him from death: whereat the Emperor was contented he should Hue to make him hatchets, and her bells, beads, and copper; for they thought him as well of all occupations as themselves. For the King himself will make his own robes, shoes, bows, arrows, pots; plant, hunt, or do any thing so well as the rest. . . .

[5] Two days after, Powhatan having disguised himself in the most fearfulest manner he could, caused Captain Smith to be brought forth to a great house in the woods, and there upon a mat by the fire to be left alone. Not long after from behind a mat that divided the house, was made the most dolefullest noise he ever heard; then Powhatan more like a devil than a man, with some two hundred more as black as himself, came unto him and told him now they were friends, and presently he should go to Jamestown, to send him two great guns, and a grindstone, for which he would give him the Country of Capahowosick, and forever esteem him as his son Nantaquoud.

Source: John Smith, "The Founding of Jamestown (1607)," from his *General History of Virginia* (1624), in Francis Whiting Halsey, ed., *Great Epochs in American History, Described by Famous Writers from Columbus to Roosevelt*, vol. II (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, c. 1912), 58–60.



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