

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON JOHN AND ANN LAYDON With Some Questions to Think About

### John Laydon:

- Was a member of the first group of English settlers to Virginia in 1607.
- Came as an employee of the London Company and was listed as a laborer, but later accounts described him as a carpenter.
- He was 26 years old when he came to Virginia.
- He survived the first summer when 66 of the 104 settlers died.
- That first summer was particularly difficult for the English settlers: the heat and humidity were something they were not used to; they had little to drink but the brackish water in the river; their food allowance was a small can of barley soaked in water.
- The fish they caught in the river to supplement their diet were frequently contaminated by the raw sewage that had been dumped there. The fish if not cooked immediately spoiled rapidly in the heat. It is thought that salt-water poisoning, typhoid fever and dysentery (severe diarrhea) caused many of the deaths that first summer.
- The Paspahegh Indians, their closest neighbors, attacked the settlers at the fort periodically, killing some of the men.
- George Percy wrote: "There were never Englishmen left in a foreign country in such misery as we were in this new-discovered Virginia."
- Married Ann Burras in December 1608 – the first English wedding in North America.
- He and his family survived the "Starving Time".
- You will remember what Mistress Peirce said about the starving time and what the settlers ate. **How did John and his family survive? Did John brave the woods outside the fort to find food for his family? Did he save part of his daily allowance each day to make sure he would have food later when the supply in the fort ran out?**
- **Is it possible that John and his family were part of the group of 30 people sent to spend the winter at Point Comfort?** These people found enough food in the region to live very comfortably all winter. **What do you think?**
- In the census of 1624/25 he was listed as living in Elizabeth City. His property was described as being two buildings inside a palisade and he had 6 barrels of corn, one musket and 40 lbs of lead. He was listed as living there with his wife and four daughters.
- He was given 200 acres of land in 1619 because he and his wife were "ancient planters" (people who came to Virginia before 1616) and were entitled to 100 acres of land apiece.

- He added to his land by transporting people to the colony in 1636 and may have been granted land by the colony for his daughter Virginia, the first English child born at Jamestown.
- By 1638 John and Anne owned 1,250 acres of land – quite an accomplishment for a carpenter and a maidservant.

**How do you think John felt about his accomplishments in Virginia?**



Carpenters like John Laydon helped to build the fort.

### Ann Burras Laydon:

- Came to Virginia in September 1608 as a maidservant to Mistress Forest. She was 13 years old. They were the first two English women to come to Jamestown.
- We must assume that Mistress Forest died soon after her arrival, as there is no mention ever made of her again. That would have left Ann, a young girl just about to turn fourteen, as the only unmarried English female in Virginia. **How do you think she felt? Did she seek a husband to offer her protection? What kind of man would you have chosen if you had been Ann?**
- In December Ann married John Laydon.
- Ann and John's first child was born in the fall of 1609. A little girl whom they named Virginia. She was the third English baby born in the New World as two babies were born in the colony established by Sir Walter Raleigh at Roanoke in 1587. **Do you think Ann was happy to see that there were women with children in the "third supply", which arrived at Jamestown in August of 1609?**
- Ann, John and little Virginia survived the terrible "Starving Time".
- Anne would have needed slightly more food than the other settlers as she was nursing her baby. **Did her husband give her part of his daily allowance? Was John was able to catch turtles or fish in the river for his family? How do you think she managed to keep herself and her baby alive?**
- **Was it possible that Ann, Virginia and John were part of the group of 30 people who spent the winter at Point Comfort?** Those 30 people found plenty to eat there and lived comfortably all winter. **What do you think?**
- During the Martial Law period, Ann and another woman named Jane Wright were whipped for "stealing from the company".
- Ann and Jane were assigned to sew shirts for the colony's servants. If they didn't finish the shirts they would not receive their food allowance for the day. For some unknown reason these two women ran out of thread before they finished the shirts. They took a ravel of thread from the bottoms of other shirts to get enough thread to finish the ones they were working on. This made some of the shirts shorter than others.
- The officials accused them of "stealing" from the company. They were both whipped and as Ann was pregnant she suffered a miscarriage that night.
- **How do you think Ann felt about being accused of stealing?** Under martial law the accused is guilty until proven innocent and there is no jury and the accused cannot appeal the verdict. **Do you think a jury would have found Ann guilty if she had been tried in civilian court, where the accused is innocent until proven guilty?**
- Ann and John had four daughters – Virginia, Alice, Katherine and Margaret.
- In 1638 Ann would have been 43 and she and her husband had accumulated 1,250 acres of

land.



Ann would have prepared food for her family in a kitchen similar to this one.

**SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**  
**(For Prospective “Reporters” Interviewing Ann and John Laydon)**

John Laydon was a member of the first group of settlers who came to Virginia in 1607. He came as a servant or employee of the London Company and was listed as a laborer. Ann Burras Laydon was one of the first two English women to come to Virginia in the fall of 1608. She came as a maidservant to Mistress Forest. In December of 1608 Ann and John were married.

Interview Ann and/or John in the year 1638. By this time they have four daughters and own over 1,000 acres of land. Try to find out how they feel about the way the colony has grown and developed over the past thirty years. Get them to describe the hardships they endured in the early years of the settlement. Was it worth it? Would they advise others to come to live in Virginia? **To help you with your questions here are some things to think about.**

- When John Laydon came to Virginia in 1607, he was listed as a laborer. What kind of work do you suppose he did?
- That first summer was particularly difficult for the English settlers – 66 of the 104 men and boys died during that summer. What did they die of and how did John survive?
- Ann Burras was the only unmarried English woman at the fort and certainly must have had a lot of suitors for her hand. How do you suppose John persuaded Ann to choose him as her husband?
- You will remember what Mistress Peirce said about the Starving Time and what the settlers ate. How did John, Ann and their baby (born in the fall of 1609) survive?
- Life in Virginia during the Martial Law period was very hard and Ann suffered under the system. She was tried in a military court for stealing from the London Company and found guilty. In a military court the accused is guilty until proven innocent, cannot be tried by a jury and cannot appeal the verdict.
- Would people in England have wanted to come to live in Virginia under martial law and not have the same rights they had enjoyed in England?