

# JAMESTOWN, Founding of a Nation and the Anglican Communion

...by Rev. Richard W. Davies

How did the Anglican Communion begin? The simple answer is to note the beginning of a parish church outside of the British Isles. That answer will take us to Jamestown, Virginia, and the year of our Lord, 1607.

In 1603, one of King James I interests was to colonize a new part of the world. The King was encouraged by the Rev. Richard Hakluyt, and priest of the Church of England, as an explorer and geographer. So the King issued letter patent to English businessmen to form a business venture called the Virginia Company (name for Elizabeth I, the “virgin queen.”) and to found a settlement and an English parish in the new world of America. The King named Hakluyt as the rector, and he named an English priest, Robert Hunt, to be his vicar and chaplain to the Virginia Company.

Robert Hunt was born about 1560. He had been the vicar of the parish of Reculver in Kent, the historic church which marked the landing of St. Augustine in 597 and the first Christian settlement in England brought from Europe. He later was the Vicar of Heathfield, in Sussex.

On December 19, 1606, three ships, Susan Constant, Godspeed, and Discovery left England for the new colony. The journey was storm-tossed and therefore delayed. Hunt almost died from illness, but he continued to minister to the irritable crew and businessmen. Hunt alone was shown respect and trust.

On April 19, 1607, the expedition touched American land and they erected a cross, prayed at a point they called Cape Henry. After exploring an river the named for King James, they selected a peninsula 45 miles inland and on May 13, 1607, they named it Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement, and initial Anglican congregation, in the new world.

On May 24 Hunt led the reconciled group to the first Celebration of Holy Communion in the new world. That Holy Eucharist can be identified as the seeding of the Anglican Communion. Every day Morning and Evening Prayer were read from the 1604 Book of Common Prayer, and every third month the Eucharist was celebrated. Hunt preached two sermons every Sunday. A second Eucharist was offered on June 21, to give thanks for the new Virginia Company leaders.

Capt. John Smith (whose life was saved by Pocahontas) recorded in his journal that the church in summer was an old sail stretched between trees. The pulpit was a bar of wood nailed to two trees. In winter, they did erect a barn like structure. Hunger, cold, heat, accidents and wounds, illness and jealousy battered the colonists. About half died in the winter of 1607.

A second ship, captained by Capt. Newport, arrived in January 1608. A fire burned the warehouse, the church and Hunt’s library. He repeated the call to “submit yourselves every man one to another.

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On or about April, 1608, Robert Hunt died, after being in Virginia less that a year and with the expedition for about 15 months. His death was reported to the Archbishop of Canterbury, noting in Hunt a man not involved in papist plots, nor a separatist. The second Chaplain Richard Buck, arrived in 1610, only to find 60 survivors. Buck promptly offered a service of thanksgiving.

Just as St. Augustine played a crucial role in establishing the church in England, so Robert Hunt did to plant the English church in America, the formative step to begin the Anglican Communion.