**Tobacco in Virginia**

Officials of the Virginia Company established the colony at Jamestown to make a profit.  They expected the colonists to find marketable natural resources, develop industries or produce an agricultural product that would succeed in making money for the colony and its investors in England. After finding no precious metals and failing at such endeavors as glassmaking and silk production, John Rolfe finally succeeded by growing a sweet variety of tobacco which was all the rage in England. In other words, *consumers*were waiting!  This meant land became a very important *resource* since a great deal of land was required to grow tobacco.  Because growing tobacco also required a lot of hard work and labor, more people (*human resources*) were needed to work in the fields.  The more workers one had, the more tobacco they could grow and the greater the *profit*they could recognize.  Indentured servitude met this need at first, but later slavery became entrenched as an institution in Virginia, because of the labor force it provided the colonists for tobacco *production*.  It didn’t take the colonists long to realize that *economic specialization* would be the way to go, and tobacco became a *cash crop* for the colony.

In spite of the popularity of “the weed” in London, John Rolfe probably knew better than to smoke a pipe in front of King James I as it was well-known that the king was vehemently opposed to tobacco. In 1604, King James I wrote that the substance polluted man’s “inward parts….with an unctuous and oily kind of soot.”  This is interesting to point out to students given our recognition today of tobacco’s harmful effects.

**John Rolfe -** John Rolfe left England bound for Jamestown in May 1609.  He was aboard the ship *Sea Venture*which was the flagship of a nine-ship convoy of 500 settlers.  In July, a hurricane blew several of the ships off course.  The *Sea Venture* ran aground on a reef off the Bermudas, but the entire company of 150 safely reached shore in the ship’s boats.  John Rolfe and his wife had a daughter who was born and died on Bermuda.  His wife passed away either before or shortly after reaching Virginia.  Once in Virginia, John Rolfe experimented with the planting of tobacco seeds he obtained from somewhere in the Caribbean.  He gave some tobacco from his crop to friends, and they agreed that the new leaf was very pleasant and better than the Indian tobacco.  He shipped the remainder of his crop to England where it compared favorably with “Spanish” leaf.  At about this same time, Pocahontas, daughter of Powhatan, paramount chief of the Indians in Tidewater Virginia, was kidnapped and brought to Jamestown.  John Rolfe eventually married her in 1614.  Their marriage coincided with a temporary peace with the Indians, allowing the settlers to develop and expand their colony, including planting more tobacco.  In 1616 he took his wife and infant son, Thomas, to England.  Pocahontas, now known by her Christian name of Rebecca, was introduced to English royalty.  It was here that she died and Thomas remained under the care of a guardian in England.  Upon Rolfe’s return to Jamestown, he became a member of the House of Burgesses and continued his efforts to improve the quality and quantity of tobacco in Virginia.