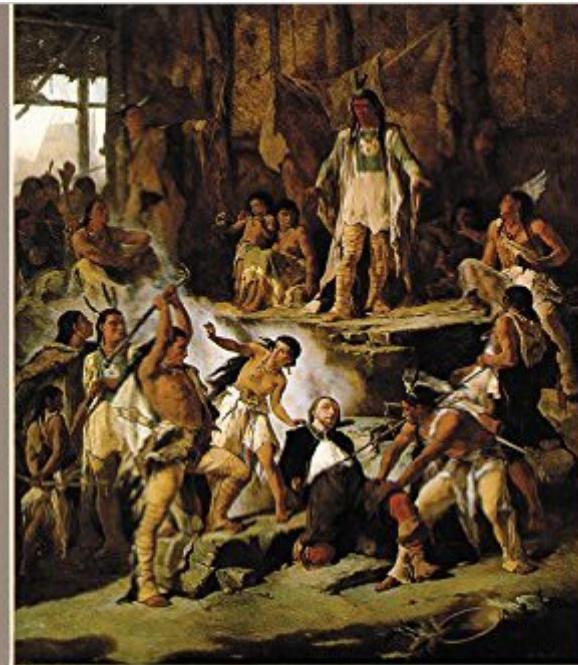


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Pocahontas (The Civilization Of The American Indian Series)



Pocahontas

by Grace Steele Woodward



Synopsis

Dispelling the clouds of romance and legend that have surrounded Pocahontas throughout the more than two centuries since her death, Grace Steele Woodward here re-creates the life of the Powhatan Indian princess. Indeed, the true story, as it emerges from these pages, is probably more dramatic and certainly more significant for American history than the legend. The story of Pocahontas coincides with the founding of Jamestown, the first permanent English colony in the New World. Her story begins with her first visit to the colony as a child of ten and ends with her journey to England with her English husband, John Rolfe, and their young son. The event which catapulted her to fame was, of course, her rescue of Captain John Smith from murder at the hands of her father, Chief Powhatan, and his warriors. But the more significant contribution she made was her almost singlehanded deliverance of the Jamestown colonists from starvation and massacre. Without her compassionate gifts of food and warnings about her father's plots against them, the Jamestown settlers would probably have met the same fate as that of the Roanoke settlers. Pocahontas' visit to London was arranged by the Virginia Company, which established the Jamestown colony, not only as a gesture of appreciation to the young princess but also as a means of stimulating further interest in New World colonization. It was Pocahontas' final act of devotion to the colonists. She was never to see her homeland again. In preparation for writing this biography, Mrs. Woodward searched out the Virginia settings where Pocahontas lived as a child and those in England which she visited in adulthood. The author studied every pertinent document of the period, from official records of the Virginia Company to letters of highborn Londoners telling about Pocahontas' visit to England and its sorrowful aftermath.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book might have been titled The Plight of the Virginia Colony, or Powhatan, King of Early Eastern America. It's as much about those things as it is about the Indian girl. That's not the author's fault and pointing it out is not intended as a knock against the book. If you're interested in a solid history of the beginning of the Virginia colony, this book is for you. But to get back to Pocahontas, if it's her biography, where is she? The truth is, of course, our information regarding her is sporadic. She disappears for months, even years at a time, and for long stretches of the book, too. The more pertinent question may be, what did she accomplish? Strip away the legends and the romance, and what do we have? A precocious princess, the daughter of a very powerful king, a strong-willed girl who was born into royalty and who, for better or worse, played a very important role in the earliest history of the settling of the North American continent. How big of a role did she play, and did she alter the course of American history? Oftentimes, we view history as following an inevitable course. Historical figures don't bend history to their will. They only appear to bend it and are seen afterward, to have been carried along by the tide of historical forces. They may move it but only in the direction it would have gone anyway. So the Virginia Colony wouldn't have failed without the intervention of Pocahontas, and even if it had failed, North America would still be what it is today. Or not. Maybe some country besides England, (Spain, perhaps,) would have settled North America. Implausible? Hard to image? Maybe, but we'll never know.

This is a captivating tale of the Powhatans and their Pocahontas, or Matoaka as she was known. Born the daughter of the powerful Powhatan, it's almost as though she were placed by providence at the juncture of the English and the eastern woodlands Indians. Just ten when the Jamestown settlers arrived in 1607, she became early known for her cheer and joy in seeking friends amongst the colonists. But clashes came, and her aging father sought to expel the settlers, and almost succeeded, with the help the colonists' starvation and disease. Three years after their arrival, the colony was abandoned, the departing ships at the mouth of the James waiting for the morning tide to carry them to England. The relief ships pulled into view at that instant, a miraculous event, and Jamestown survived, and in time established a firm foothold in Virginia. Clashes with the Powhatans continued, however, and the colonists captured Pocahontas as a hostage against the relief of the

Indian-held English captives. In her captivity, which seems to have been a friendly one, she was converted to Christianity-- the stories of her memorizing the various church liturgies are dear-- and married the young colonist John Rolfe. Her father agreed to abandon his war against the settlers, and indeed touchingly sent a string of fresh water pearls for her wedding and deeded land to Rolfe. There were to be eight years of peace following their union. The Virginia Company saw advantage to her traveling to London with her new husband, and by then young Thomas Rolfe, their child. They arrived in England in 1616, and she was received as royalty by King James and Queen Ann, and met many of the English notables of the day.

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