AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF MIDDLESEX COUNTY, VIRGINIA

A Thesis

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by

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Sandra

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Archaeological Resource Assessment of Middlesex County, Virginia is to assess the archaeological resource database and, from this assessment, to develop preliminary predictive information to assist in future planning by the county. This type of planning is critical for protecting cultural resources in light of projected growth and development in the county. This assessment report includes prehistoric and historic contexts for the project area, a database of known archaeological sites, predictive models for determining areas of potential archaeological sites, and recommendations for future planning.

There are 35 archaeological sites within Middlesex County listed in the files at the Department of Historic Resources (DHR). Prehistoric sites account for 14 of the total, 19 are historic, and 2 are multicomponent. Recorded historic sites are concentrated at Hewick Plantation where Professor Theodore R. Reinhart and students from The College of William and Mary have recorded sites 44MX24 through 44MX35 (except 44MX29), one-third of all sites recorded in the county. Middlesex County is unusual in that only one of the sites on file for the county, 44MX14, has resulted from a compliance-generated survey. Almost all known sites are located near the county's major waterways. Using site inventory and documentary sources, maps were constructed showing areas of high potential for archaeological sites.

The assessment found that Middlesex County likely possesses a large number of significant archaeological resources, the vast majority of which remain to be identified and fully researched. The county may want to improve site forms in the state site inventory at the DHR, which were found to vary in quality of data. In addition, intensive Phase I survey in undeveloped and lesser-developed parts of the county is recommended because it would provide a more complete archaeological inventory. The assessment also found several legislative improvements, including zoning law changes, easements, the Certified Local Government program, a model resource protection planning process, and voluntary preservation/stewardship programs, that Middlesex County may want to undertake with regard to archaeological resources.

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF MIDDLESEX COUNTY, VIRGINIA

CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

The purpose of this study of Middlesex County, Virginia is to assess the archaeological resource database and, from this assessment, to develop preliminary predictive information to assist in future planning by the county. This assessment should not, however, be confused with a Phase I survey. The purpose of Phase I surveys is to provide specific locational information concerning the nature and distribution of all archaeological and architectural resources within a given area and to offer a preliminary assessment of the eligibility of any identified sites for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). However, a resource assessment is based only on historical sources and previously recorded site data. The known archaeological sites comprise what is likely to be a very small percentage of all sites in Middlesex County. Therefore, the data can only be used to predict trends in the distribution of unrecorded archaeological sites and their research potential. This thesis is based largely on the Archaeological Assessment of the City of Suffolk Virginia by Randy M. Lichtenberger, Melissa L. Groveman, and Anna L. Gray.

The basic structure and several passages are borrowed from that report, including most of the prehistoric context (Lichtenberger et al. 1994). This project lays the groundwork for future investigation.

This type of planning is critical for protecting cultural resources in light of a projected 2% annual increase in population and the fact that Middlesex County "is poised on the threshold of rapid development which has the potential to greatly affect its future appearance" (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:6-7). For instance, tourism is becoming increasingly important to the county's economy. The purchase of second homes in the county has skyrocketed in recent years (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:6).

This assessment includes prehistoric and historic contexts for Middlesex County, a database of known archaeological sites, predictive models for determining areas of high potential for archaeological sites, and recommendations for future planning.

Description of the Assessment Area

Middlesex County encompasses an area of 132 square miles or 83,392 acres at the eastern end of the Middle Peninsula in the Tidewater region of Virginia (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:6). The county is bounded by the Rappahannock River in the north, by the Chesapeake Bay in the east, by the

Piankatank River and Dragon Run Swamp in the southeast, and by Essex County in the northwest (Figure 1). The population of the county in 1990 was just under 8,700 people (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:6). The Rappahannock and Piankatank rivers and their tributaries have been a primary source of income and means of transportation from the county's earliest times. The county's waterways were also quite attractive to Native Americans in the prehistoric and protohistoric periods.

The Town of Urbanna is the only incorporated area in Middlesex County. The commercial and former governmental center of Middlesex County, Urbanna was established in 1680 and incorporated on April 2, 1902. The town covers an area of 0.49 square mile along Urbanna Creek, a tributary of the Rappahannock. The county seat of government is now situated in the village of Saluda (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:6).

As in the past, the major economic enterprises in the area are agriculture, forestry, and fin and shell fishing. Middlesex is a county in transition from a rural agrarian, forestry, and fishing community to a mixed community, partly a suburb of the Richmond and Hampton Roads metropolitan areas and a vacation and retirement haven (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:6).

FIGURE 1

Map of Middlesex County, Virginia (AAA National Travel 1990)

Environmental Setting of the Assessment Area

Middlesex County is located on Virginia's Coastal Plain. It has a temperate climate with an average daily temperature ranging from 38.8 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 77.4 degrees Fahrenheit in July (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:50). Elevation in Middlesex County ranges from sea level to 123 feet above sea level where Route 17 and Route 606 intersect. The county is comprised of three principal marine terraces which represent former shorelines (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:77). Geologically, Middlesex County is located in the Atlantic Coastal Plain Province. Approximately 15% of the county is characterized by slopes greater than 15% (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:77-78).

The county contains 1,675 acres of tidal wetlands, 1,240 of which are along the Rappahannock River and its tributaries. In addition, the Dragon Run Swamp contains hundreds of acres of freshwater marsh. Over the period 1850 to 1950, Middlesex County experienced an average annual shoreline erosion of 0.8 feet. Stingray Point experienced the highest rate of erosion, averaging 6.1 feet per year over the period (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:89).

Middlesex County contains 21 different soils, all formed from sediments deposited by an ancient river or ocean (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:93). Over 59% of the county's soils are considered prime farmland, a high

percentage for Virginia communities (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:98). Not surprisingly, 83% of the total land area of Middlesex County was devoted to agriculture in 1910, though that area had dropped to 25% in 1987 (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:99). In 1992, the county contained 49,992 acres of timberland (Middlesex County, Virginia 1994:101).

Significance Concept

Significance is an important concept in preservation planning. The basic assumption behind significance in an archaeological assessment is that not all archaeological sites are equally important and, therefore, not equally deserving of protection. Significance is an important issue for local governments which seek to distribute limited resources among various projects. Unfortunately for archaeologists, the realities of modern living seldom allow archaeological research to be placed near the top of any list of governmental priorities. Fortunately, archaeologists have come to appreciate this fact, for the most part, and have begun to develop a scheme to "rank" the importance of different sites.

The significance concept, as used in historic preservation today, has its beginnings in the legislation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An 1896 Supreme Court ruling stated that an 1888 statute could only

permit condemnation of property for public use to preserve historic sites if those sites were of national significance. The requirement helped shape future legislation including the 1906 Antiquities Act and the 1935 Historic Sites Act. At the same time, private preservation groups were developing criteria for selecting buildings worthy of preservation. This too influenced the development of the significance concept (Tainter and Lucas 1983).

In the 1920's and 1930's, standards were needed to guide the emerging federal historic preservation effort. In 1934, the National Resources Board released standards formulated by National Park Service Chief Historian Verne Chatelain. These standards described the determining factor in the preservation of a site as "certain matchless or unique qualities which entitle it to a position of first rank..." The passage of the Historic Sites Act of 1935 embedded the 1934 formulation of the significance concept in preservation law.

In 1949 the private National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings issued selection criteria based on the 1934 standards. These criteria stated:

> The chief determining factor is that the area or structure must possess either certain important historical associations which entitle it to a position of high rank in the history of the nation, state, or region in which it lies; or, in the case of a structure, be in itself of sufficient antiquity and artistic or architectural significance to deserve a position of high rank, even though not having other important historical associations. These qualities exist:

> a. In such historic structures or sites as are naturally the points or bases in which the broad political, social, or cultural history of the nation, state, or region is best exemplified and from which the visitor can grasp the larger patterns of national, state, or regional history.
>
> b. In such monuments and areas as are significant because of their associations with key figures or important events in national, state, or regional limits or because of their relationship to other monuments or areas.
>
> c. In structures or sites exemplifying in a high degree the history and achievements of aboriginal man in America or of outstanding scientific importance for the light they shed on this subject (Tainter and Lucas 1983).

The National Historic Trust revised and expanded the criteria in 1956. The revision served as the basis for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 which is in effect today. The NHPA of 1966 as amended states that sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places are those:

> (a) that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
>
> (b) that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
>
> (c) that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic value, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
>
> (d) that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history (reprinted in Tainter and Lucas 1983:708).

Marley R. Brown III, Director of Archaeological Research at The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, advocates the

following approach to significance evaluation, one which has been applied usefully in James City County, York County, City of Poquoson, and the City of Williamsburg (Brown and Bragdon 1986). Stating the relationship between the first and fourth National Register criteria, he writes:

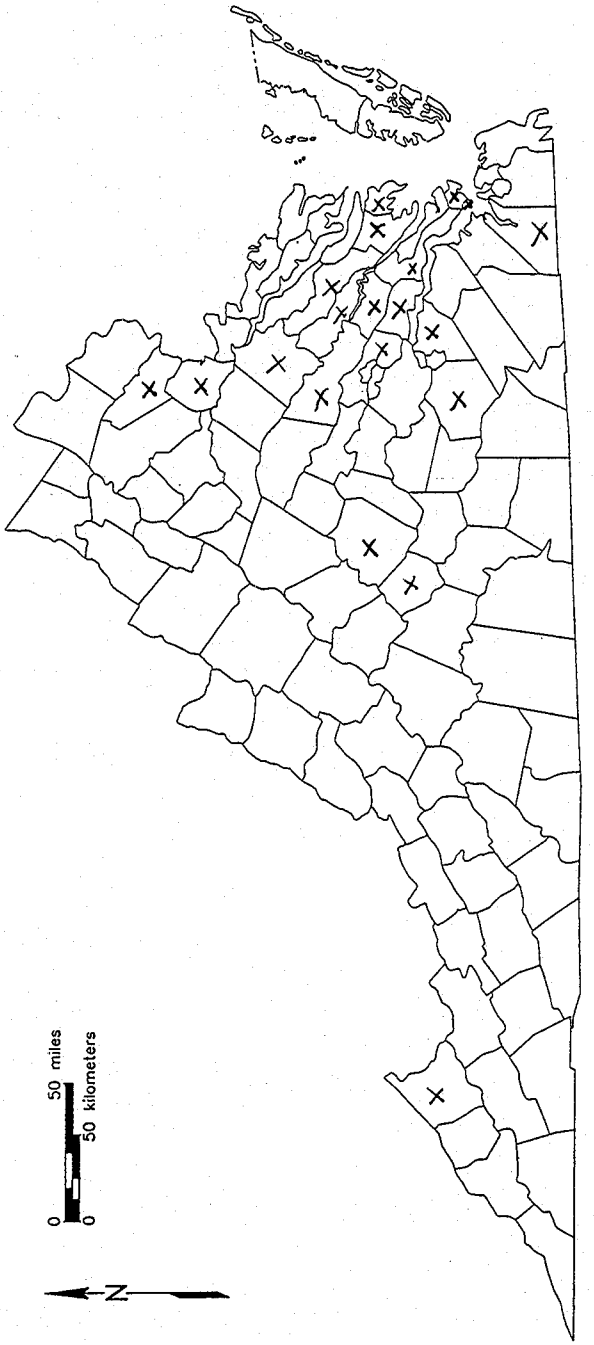
> The quality of significance is present in properties that possess integrity of location, setting, and association, and that have yielded or may be likely to yield information necessary for a full understanding of and appreciation by the public of the persons, events, and processes that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history at the local, regional, and national levels (Brown 1986).

This scheme, embodied in the Resource Protection Planning Process (RP3) discussed later in this thesis, is a guide for choosing wisely from the various avenues of archaeological inquiry open to researchers in a given municipality. The premise behind the significance concept as used in the RP3 is to protect and research most vigorously those sites which are apt to answer important questions and enhance our understanding of the past. Of course, significance used in this way is bound to change as the current state of knowledge of the archaeological profession changes. For instance, new finds and better methods may reveal so much information about a previously obscure site type or period that less significance will be attached to other similar sites. Also, what may be significant in Middlesex County may not be significant on a global, national, or even regional scale.

Another relevant question with regard to Middlesex County archaeology is the importance, archaeologically of the fact that the county possesses its written records from early settlement. Twenty Virginia counties' records were burned during the Civil War. Many of them were Virginia Tidewater counties. On the Middle Peninsula, only Middlesex and Essex Counties retain their original records (Figure 2)(Joseph White, personal communication 1994).

One might argue that the presence of documentary sources in Middlesex makes doing historical archaeology there less useful. It may be that archaeologists will simply excavate in order to test the documentary record. However, as archaeologist James Deetz states in his book, Flowerdew Hundred, if one takes a "multidirectional" approach and works back and forth between the documents and the archaeology, one is "constantly refining and reformulating questions raised by one set of data by looking at it against the background of the other" (Deetz 1993:159). This approach will allow archaeologists to make even greater contributions in Middlesex County than in counties which have incomplete records.

FIGURE 2



Map of Virginia showing burned-over counties (Joseph White, personal communication 1994)

CHAPTER 2:

Prehistoric Context

Introduction

The prehistory of Tidewater Virginia and, by extension, Middlesex County is generally consistent with that of the Middle Atlantic region. The earliest human habitation of the region dates to approximately 12,000 years Before Present (B.P.) as part of the Paleoindian tradition. Adaptations to climatic change approximately 10,000 years B.P. mark the beginning of the Archaic tradition which is followed by the Woodland period at about 3,000 years B.P. Archaeologists generally divide the Archaic and Woodland traditions into early, middle, and late periods based on changing patterns of subsistence, settlement, and technology. The following are the divisions used by the Department of Historic Resources (DHR): Paleoindian period (12,000-10,000 B.P.), Early Archaic period (10,000-8500 B.P.), Middle Archaic period (8500-5000 B.P.), Late Archaic period (5000-3200 B.P.), Early Woodland period (3200-2500 B.P.), Middle Woodland period (2500-1000 B.P.), and Late Woodland period (1000-400 B.P.).

Paleoindian Period (12,000-10,000 B.P.)

The earliest inhabitants of North America are believed to have crossed the Bering land bridge from Asia at least 14,000 years ago. Known as the Paleoindians, these people spread rapidly over the continent in pursuit of game and other resources as the last ice sheet retreated northward across Canada. Their presence in Virginia is suspected to occur as early as 12,000 years B.P. The climate of Tidewater Virginia was cooler during the Paleoindian period, supporting a jack pine and spruce forest.

The Paleoindian presence is identified by a specialized tool kit, which includes fluted projectile points manufactured from high quality lithic materials. Often of chert or jasper, fluted "Clovis" points are believed to have been used in the pursuit of now extinct big game animals such as mammoth and giant bison. These early North Americans were not only big game hunters, however. Archaeological evidence has revealed a more diversified diet including smaller game animals and wild plants. It has been proposed that Paleoindians in Tidewater Virginia followed a generalized hunting and gathering subsistence strategy (Gardner 1989). A partial dependence on game animals typically created a highly mobile existence for the Paleoindians.

It is generally believed that the Paleoindians traveled in small bands of related individuals, perhaps 10 to 15 in a

group (Gardner 1989:28). Translated archaeologically, this means that the vast majority of sites are small, temporary hunting camps. The exception to this rule in the Middle Atlantic are the well-known, larger quarry sites. These sites are centered around outcrops of chert and other high-quality cryptocrystalline lithic materials prized by the Paleoindians.

Virginia has been blessed with a relative abundance of Paleoindian period resources (McAvoy 1992). The Williamson chert quarry in Dinwiddie County is the principal Clovis site in eastern Virginia and a primary source of stone for tools. Similarly, the Mitchell Plantation Site in Sussex County has produced Paleoindian-period artifacts in association with a chert nodule outcrop (McCary and Bittner 1979). Numerous Clovis points have been recovered along the perimeter of the Dismal Swamp as well, particularly at the western edge along the Suffolk scarp (Rappleye and Gardner 1979:25).

In the Paleoindian period, Middlesex County was an upland part of the now-submerged Susquehanna river valley. Sea level was 30-24 meters lower than the present level with the coastline 10-15 km east of where it is today (Blanton and Margolin 1994:5). Certainly, many Paleoindian period resources may be submerged off the coast of Middlesex County. Still others may be located on the land areas of the county. Although no fluted points had been reported for Middlesex County as of 1982, several had been recorded in the nearby

counties of Essex (1 point), Mathews (1 point), Gloucester (5 points), and King and Queen (2 points) (McCary 1983).

Archaic Period (10,000-3200 B.P.)

The beginning of the Archaic tradition is marked by the change from a cool, moist environment in the Pleistocene epoch to a warmer, drier climate more like today's. World sea levels began to rise as a result of the addition of glacial meltwater. However, sea level was still 24-19 meters lower in the Early Archaic period and 7-8 meters lower in the Middle Archaic period. It was during the Late Archaic period that sea level came to approximate modern levels (Blanton and Margolin 1994:5-6). Vegetation changed too, from a largely boreal forest to a mixed conifer deciduous forest (Whitehead and Oaks 1979:35-37). With the mammoth and giant bison extinct, Middle Atlantic Archaic period populations exploited a wider range of food resources. Among these were deer, elk, and smaller animals as well as various plant foods. The use of aquatic environments as a food source also increased in importance during this time.

During the Archaic period, population density gradually rose, and while the band level of social organization predominated throughout, settlement patterns did change somewhat. A more diverse tool inventory indicates that Archaic-period populations were exploiting well-defined

regions and adapting forms to fit those regions. New tool forms, for instance, reflect the need to exploit specific resources that were more seasonal (Custer 1980:7). Larger base camps were located along major streams and rivers with smaller, transient hunting camps more common along small streams. Base camps, usually having a southern exposure, are often found where tributaries enter a major stream or on broad areas of land above floodplains and marshes (Custer 1990:22-23). Temporary procurement camps were located near or adjacent to desired natural resources.

Archaeologically, stone tools are the most distinctive aspect of Archaic-period material culture and are used to divide it from the earlier Paleoindian tradition. The fluted Clovis point was replaced by a variety of other fluted projectile points late in the Paleoindian period. In Virginia, the Hardaway point, with a concave base and projecting "ears," is one of these transition points. These were now often made of lesser-quality lithic materials such as quartzite, rhyolite, and argillite. In Tidewater Virginia, the earliest Archaic-period points are Palmer and Kirk. These are stemmed, corner-notched points with a triangular blade (Coe 1964).

Dating to the Middle Archaic period, Stanly, Morrow Mountain, Guilford, and Halifax points are found in Virginia. They continue the development of the stemmed projectile point (Coe 1964). It is also during the Middle Archaic period that

ground stone tools, presumably for woodworking, are introduced into the Virginia Piedmont and Coastal Plain. Ground stone atlatl weights and net sinkers are also found in the Middle Atlantic at this time (Geier 1990:90-92).

The Late Archaic period represents the greatest change in the Archaic tradition. Greater sedentism and higher population density than in previous times is exhibited. Riverine and estuarine resources became more important, as evidenced by large sites in such areas.

Tools associated with the Late Archaic period include chipped and ground stone axes, ground stone net sinkers, pestles, pecked sandstone mullers, and broad-bladed points called Savannah River. Also important to the Late Archaic period are bowls crafted from soapstone. These are likely the stylistic precursors of the earliest ceramics in the Middle Atlantic, which appear during the Woodland tradition (McLearen 1991).

Woodland Period (3200-400 B.P.)

The Woodland tradition is distinguished in part by a move to semisedentary and sedentary settlement in the Middle Atlantic. It was during the Woodland period that the greatest changes in prehistoric settlement, subsistence, and technology took place. By this late date, the climate had largely stabilized, providing more dependable sources of subsistence.

In Tidewater Virginia, as in other parts of the Middle Atlantic, Native Americans tended to aggregate near estuaries and along major drainages and their tributaries. Large base camps and village sites were located on elevated landforms with productive soils adjacent to these water resources. Large, long-term habitation sites are also found along the estuarine areas near shellfish beds (Gardner 1982). Limited-activity procurement sites were often located further inland (Gardner 1982).

Technologically, the beginning of the Early Woodland period is defined by the appearance of ceramics. Their manufacture probably diffused to the Middle Atlantic region from the southeastern United States. The earliest known ceramic type in the region is called Marcey Creek Ware (Egloff and Potter 1982:95-97). Tempered with steatite, this early type closely resembles Late Archaic-period steatite bowls in form. Other ceramics identified in Tidewater Virginia include a number of sand-tempered varieties common throughout the Early and Middle Woodland periods. The Early Woodland period may also have seen the introduction of the bow and arrow, which led to the use of smaller, varied projectile points (Gluckman 1973).

Dating to the Middle Woodland period, shell-tempered Mockley Ware and crushed granite- and gneiss-tempered Hercules Ware are found in Tidewater Virginia (Egloff and Potter 1982:103-104, 106). The Middle Woodland period in Virginia

was not marked by abrupt or elaborate changes in settlement organization. The most notable change in terms of site selection is an increased use of lower-lying settings associated with wetlands. Populations were likely organized along the lines of segmentary tribes composed of smaller, lineage-based corporate groups. These groups would assemble at base camps to cooperate in the exploitation of certain resources. From these camps, they could disperse into smaller family groups at procurement sites (Blanton 1992:88).

The Late Woodland period is characterized by the presence of large base camps and fortified villages. The fortifications are suggestive of rising intergroup conflicts (Hodges 1981). The introduction of maize and beans caused a shift to a horticultural economy supplemented by hunting and foraging (Barfield and Barber 1992:226). Agriculture was at least partly responsible for the sedentism that led to the creation of villages and chiefdoms. By the earlier part of the Late Woodland period, shellfish exploitation was still important, but, because of agriculture, the large habitation sites were not necessarily oriented to the large shellfish gathering locations (McLearen and Boyd 1989:6). The most frequently occurring form of burial in the Late Woodland period Chesapeake drainage is the ossuary. There are at least twenty-five known ossuaries in the Coastal Plain that date to the Late Woodland and Contact periods (Turner 1992:118-119). By the end of the period, ranked societies were present in the

Virginia Coastal Plain, exemplified by the Powhatan chiefdom (Turner 1992:114).

The Late Woodland-period ceramic types of Tidewater Virginia exhibit characteristics similar to those found in other cultures to the south and west, evincing greater intercultural contact. At the close of the period, shell-tempered Townsend, Roanoke, Gaston, and Potomac Creek wares predominated in the area (Egloff and Potter 1982:107-111). In addition to ceramics, artifacts of the Tidewater Virginia Late Woodland period include small, triangular projectile points, shell beads, and copper, often found in the form of pendants and beads placed in burials (Turner 1992:104).

Protohistoric Period

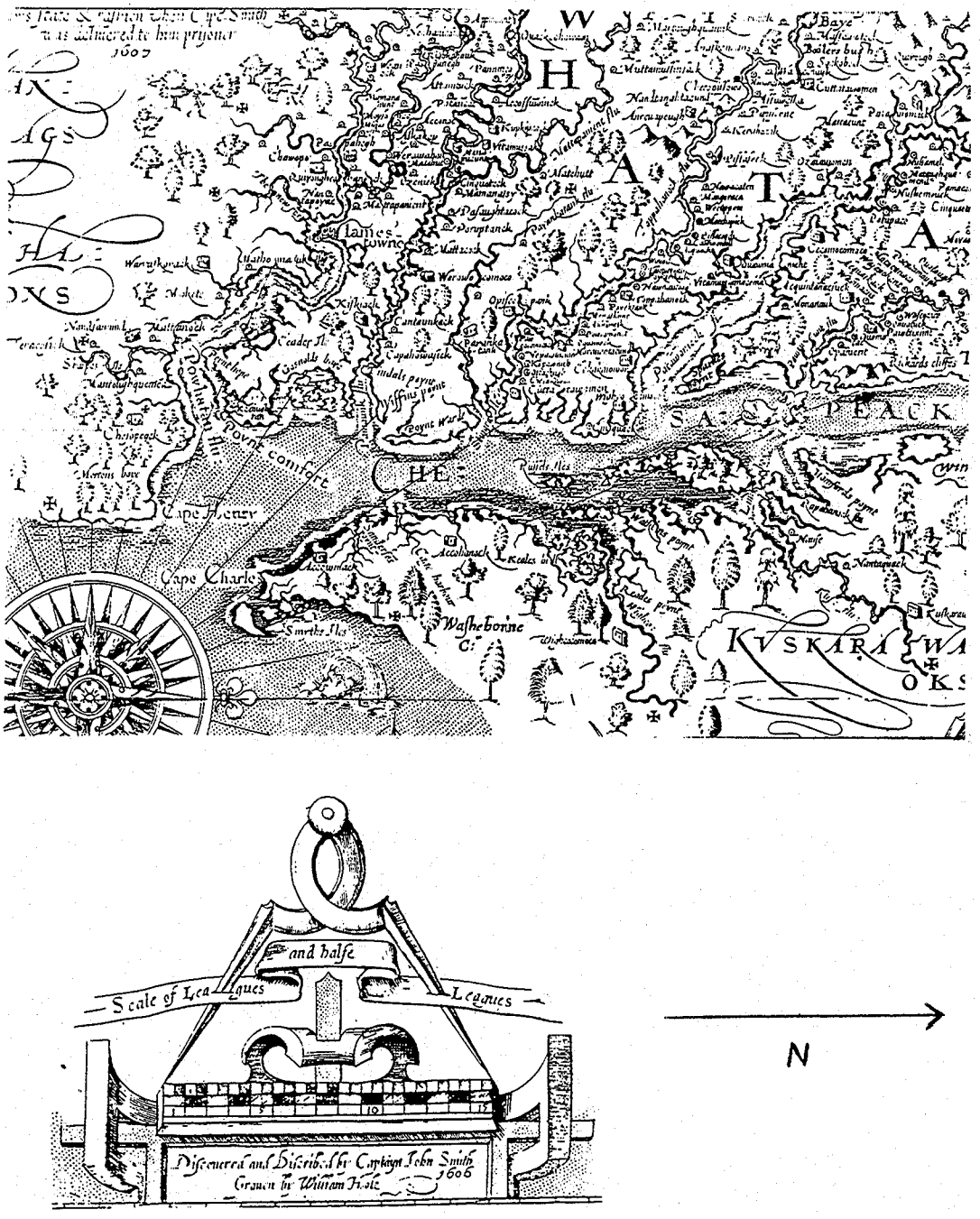
When colonists of the first permanent English settlement in North America arrived at Jamestown in 1607, they encountered members of the powerful Powhatan chiefdom. The Powhatan were in the Virginia Algonquian cultural area, which was part of the larger territory of eastern Algonquian tribes stretching from North Carolina to Newfoundland (Geier 1992:288).

At contact, the Piankatank group occupied what is today Middlesex County. The Rappahannocks had little or no economic specialization. Each village was probably capable of producing all that it needed (Rountree 1990a:32). Early

historical accounts indicate that most group members lived in villages with 10 to 50 structures. Their houses were round and made by planting wooden poles in the ground, then lashing them together and covering them with thatch or bark. The villages were often palisaded for defense and located near agricultural fields. Other structures located in the villages included drying and storage racks, storage pits, and community buildings for group functions (Hodges 1981). If a chief, or werowance lived in a village, it might have contained their longhouse, mortuary temple, "treasury," and the houses of kinfolk and elite supporters in addition to the houses of commoners (Potter 1993:27). The Piankatanks preferred to settle on fertile land near major waterways such as the Rappahannock and Piankatank rivers and their tributaries. This settlement pattern is typical of Middle Atlantic coastal groups in the Late Woodland period (Turner 1992).

Two villages are reported by early Europeans as being located within the confines of present-day Middlesex County. These were "Parankatank" near the Stormont/Healy's area and "Opiscopank" near Rosegill and Urbanna (Chowning 1994:32). Seventeenth-century maps depict these settlements, (Figure 3) (Smith 1610). While there are only two villages on the south side of the Rappahannock on John Smith's 1610 map, there are over thirty on the northern side. It is believed that the Piankatank group moved across the river to put a buffer zone between them and the sometimes brutal leader, Powhatan, to the

FIGURE 3



Map of Virginia (Smith 1610)

south. This move occurred before the arrival of the English in the area (Speck 1925). When the English moved into the area of Middlesex County in the 1640s, the Native Americans had simply left before their arrival, abandoning towns and cabins along the way (Rutman and Rutman 1984:46).

European contact with Native Americans actually occurred long before the advent of settlement at Jamestown. Following Columbus's 1492 voyage, the English, Spanish, French, and Dutch spearheaded a period of intensive exploration and colonization of North America. The earliest visitor to the Chesapeake may have been Giovanni da Verazzano, who is believed to have sailed past the Virginia Capes in 1524. The first documented contact between Powhatan and the Europeans occurred between 1559 and 1561. The encounter, actually a kidnapping, took place when a party of Spanish explorers picked up an adolescent who had been visiting south of his homeland (Rountree 1990b:15).