

Pocahontas Grave, St. Georges Church Kent UK

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The story of Pocahontas still enchants people after all these centuries. In recent years, the story has been rewritten and sometimes represented. Several stage plays, movies, and books have been written, including an animated film by Disney (Schilling, 2017). Interestingly, the real story of Pocahontas does not include her being friends with a raccoon or diving off cliffs in Virginia. The real story is, in fact, a story of tragedy. This paper clarifies the misconceptions about the young princess that have arisen in the past four centuries. The reality of the entire drama has been gathered through extensive research, done by reading articles and books, and interviewing people who claim to be the descendants of the daughter of the Powhatan chief Wahusenaca.

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(Yorktown & Us, n.d.)

Pocahontas was the daughter of the Wahunsenaca and his wife, also named Pocahontas. Her father became the chief of his tribe later. The young Pocahontas was initially named Matoka, meaning “flower which is between two streams.” According to Mattaponi’s history, this name was given to her because she was born in the rivers of Mattaponi and Pamunkey. Her mother died early on, which left Pocahontas’ father devastated. The young Pocahontas, who looked much like her mother, was raised by the tribe’s women at Werowocomoco, including her aunts. Her father, the paramount chief of the Powhatan tribe, was allowed by the tribal laws to have wives from various other villages. Hence, Matoka grew up with many brothers and sisters. Due to her being a look-alike of her mother, the young Matoka was often called by her mother’s name, Pocahontas, by her father.

The oral history of Mattaponi claims that John Smith and the English colonists landed in Tsenacomoca in 1607 when Matoka was around ten years old. At that time, John Smith was 27 years old, and the two did not marry, nor did they get involved with each other. The tribal laws of the Powhatan tribe emphasized that children were closely watched and cared for by the tribal elders. And because Pocahontas was the Chief’s daughter, she was probably given extra attention and had stricter rules for her.

(Yorktown & Us, n.d.)

When Pocahontas was only a child, John Smith and his fellow English colonists set up their first settlement near Jamestown Island. However, the colonists would explore the nearby area for possible resources that they could acquire. The villagers were afraid of John Smith because he was infamous

for putting a gun to people's heads and demanding food and supplies for his fellow settlers. During one of Smith's exploration trips, he met Powhatan warriors who captured him and took him to their chief's younger brother.

Since both the English and the Powhatan were afraid of the Spanish Conquistadors for their own reasons, they both allied to protect each other. Oral and written history narrate that with time, Wahunsenaca began liking Smith and even offered him the post of Werowance, the colonists' leader. The Powhatan also allowed Smith to share their hunting grounds for access to the game and seafood.

Stories tell that Smith claimed that Pocahontas saved his life during the four-day ceremony of his becoming a werowance. However, the Mattaponi claim that there was no reason to kill someone who was going to be honored by the chief of the tribe. Besides, children were not allowed to be present during any religious ceremony of the tribe, like the werowance ceremony. Hence, the fact that John Smith was being honored at the ceremony and that Pocahontas, being a child, was not allowed at the service answers the question of whether she threw herself in front of John Smith to beg for his life or not.

John Smith, Trying to Get More Food for the Settlers

(Yorktown & Us, n.d.)

According to some historians, Pocahontas rebelled against her father by bringing food for the people of Jamestown. But the Mattaponi people deny such claims. Pocahontas' village, Werowocomoco, was located at a distance of 12 miles from Jamestown. Hence, the possibility of a ten-year-old child traveling such a long distance, without supervision, goes against the Powhatan tribe's culture. She did go to Jamestown, but that was for an official goodwill meeting to promote peace between the English and the tribesmen. Besides, the journey included crossing the river through a heavily built canoe, and lifting such a heavy canoe needed ten strong people (Yorktown & Us, n.d.).

It was in 1608 that John Smith's post as werowance of the colonists took a complete turn. The colonists were now demanding to plant crops, and Smith had become more violent to meet his demands. He would hold villagers at gunpoint to force them to accept his claims against the Mattaponi. The Powhatan chief commented that John Smith was the first werowance he had treated royally, though Smith treated his hosts with complete disregard and insulted them. However, Smith himself claims that Wahunsenacawh wanted him dead, and if it hadn't been for Pocahontas, he would have been killed.

Native historians claim that Smith's claims are fabricated because many watchful eyes monitored the young princess. Besides, the Powhatan chief was not willing to ruin the two parties' relations. To prove this point, a letter written by Smith in 1608 was published without Smith being informed.

Nowhere in the letter is it written that Pocahontas saved Smith's life twice. Smith only made his claims in his book, *General Historie of Virginia*, published in 1624, when the people who could have denied his allegations were already dead.

The 1600s were not such a good time for the natives. The tribal people of Werowocomoco were used to wearing their traditional summer clothes, like exposed breasts for the women and almost nothing for children, however, this resulted in them being targeted by the colonists. Young children were often raped, while native Indian women had no option other than offering themselves to colonists to keep their children safe. While all this was going on, young Matoka had grown up and was of marriageable age. In a betrothal ceremony, she was named Pocahontas, after her mother. During the dance, she selected the brother of Potowomac Chief Japazaw, Kocoum, as her husband. She married him at the age of 14.

Rumors began circulating that the colonists planned to kidnap Pocahontas because they thought that it might thwart attacks from the natives. When the colonists learned about her whereabouts, they came to take her and traded her for a copper pot from her father-in-law. She handed over her child to the tribal women before leaving with the colonists. After being kidnapped, it is learned that she was raped by multiple people for a long time and suffered from depression because of it.

The Pocahontas Wedding with John Rolfe

Later, when the colony of Jamestown was falling, John Rolfe, in an attempt to secure an alliance with the natives, married Pocahontas. However, claims that she became a free and civilized person after that are baseless because she was never allowed to meet her father or any other family member since her kidnapping. After the marriage, the Powhatans taught the settlers tobacco farming, which became a lucrative business for the settlers. Pocahontas was even taken to England, where she was presented in front of the nobles, to raise funds for the immigrants.

Pocahontas at the Court of King James

However, Pocahontas did not enjoy her trip to England and desired to return to her native land. She met John Smith and expressed her anger over the treatment of the natives, though shortly afterward she was poisoned and died. The tribal people who had accompanied her to England were sold off into slavery.

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