



## FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

**Female Ancestor Number: 016**

**Name: Pocahontas, Matoaka**

**Dates: (—- March 1617)**

**Colonial Society: VA**

**Date added to ROA: 3-13-2013**

**Service: Historic Founder**

**Authority:** Dorman, J.F., *Adventurers of Purse and Person*, 4th Edition, Vol. 3, pp. 23 - 27.

### **Biography:**

Pocahontas was born c. 1596 near what became current day Jamestown, Virginia. She was a Powhatan, the daughter of Chief Powhatan (known as Wahunsenacah by his people) of the Powhatan nation which included 28 tribes in the Tidewater, Virginia area. The name Pocahontas was one of her many native names and the one by which English settlers knew her. At the time it translated to “little wanton” or “mischievous one”.

Legend, derived from the diary of John Smith, leader of the Jamestown settlement, recounts his story of being held captive by Chief Powhatan, sentenced to execution and of being saved by Pocahontas who begged for his life to be saved. This tale was disputed almost immediately and has continued to be questioned ever since. But it has created an everlasting love story and relationship between Pocahontas and Smith that still entertains to this day.

What is known as fact is that Pocahontas frequently visited the Jamestown settlers. She often brought food and supplies and taught them survival skills known to the native population but not to the English. In 1613, Sir Samuel Argall took Pocahontas prisoner in an attempt to use her as a negotiating tool in order to obtain the release of captured English prisoners and stolen weapons. Powhatan returned some of the prisoners, but not the weapons, and Pocahontas was not returned to her father. Rather, she was taken to Henricus, the second English settlement, and installed in the home (Rock Hall) of Reverend Alexander Whitaker where she was taught Christianity, baptized and known as Rebecca.

Pocahontas/Rebecca married John Rolfe in April of 1614. Her father approved of the marriage, as did Sir Thomas Dale, then acting Governor of the colony. With the marriage, peace ruled between the settlers and the Powhatans until Chief Powhatan's death. The Rolfe's had one son named Thomas.

In 1616, the Rolfe family, a group of accompanying Powhatan tribe members and colonists sailed with Governor Dale to England. Today it is thought that this was a marketing-tour for the Virginia Company to showcase the success of the colony and win support from King James I and additional investors. The entourage was entertained in the highest echelons of English society with Pocahontas' “royal” lineage and status being advertised at every opportunity. The only known life image of Pocahontas was engraved on this trip by Simon Van de Passe. In it, Pocahontas holds a fan of three Ostrich feathers indicating her royal status.



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On the return trip to Virginia, Pocahontas became ill. This necessitated a stop at Gravesend which at the time was the last-port-of-call on the River Thames before reaching the North Sea. Her illness, a respiratory infection, quickly caused her death, and she died on March 21, 1617 at Gravesend where she was quickly buried in the Chancel in Saint George's Church.

In 1914, The Virginia Society raised funds to create and install two large stained-glass windows to honor their native Virginian Pocahontas. One window depicts Rebecca (Pocahontas) giving relief to the Virginia settlers. The other is of Pocahontas sojourning in a far country. Both windows survived extensive bombing during WWII and are a popular tourist attraction to this day.