

FIRST LANDING

ROBERT HUNT

There are times in life when godly men and women are called from obscurity and onto the world's stage to fulfill God's purpose. In December of 1606, one such man, a humble Anglican priest from a small church in the south of England, accepted that call and gave his life to help establish God's plan for America and the world. His name was Robert Hunt.

On December 19, 1606, burning with a passion to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a new land, Hunt left his family behind and set sail as chaplain of the Virginia Company expedition that would birth Jamestown, Virginia, the first permanent English settlement in the New World. While others embarked on the journey to Virginia to gain wealth, power, and freedom from their former lives, Rev. Hunt sought to plant a new Christian church and bring the message of salvation to the native tribes of America.

Rev. Robert Hunt was born in 1568. He was ordained by the Church of England and selected by the Archbishop of Canterbury to be the vicar of Reculver, County of Kent, England. He served in this position from 1594 to 1602 when he was appointed vicar of All Saints Church at Old Heathfield, East Sussex, England.

Hunt was one of 105 colonists who left for the New World aboard three small ships on the river Thames that frigid December of 1606. The first six weeks of this journey were spent battling to escape the English Channel. Storms and contrary winds hindered their progress and they remained pinned down just off the coast of Kent, England, in an area known as "the Downs," a distance of less than 12 miles from Old Heathfield, where Hunt had been vicar.

Hunt earned the admiration and respect of the colonists in the midst of the delay off the Downs when he intervened in a dispute between the soon-to-be president of Jamestown, the aristocratic Edward-Maria Wingfield and the commoner soldier Captain John Smith. Wingfield and some of his gentlemen colleagues had become impatient with the delay, the cramped quarters of the ships, the

tossing sea, and the frigid weather. They argued for returning to the comforts of their nearby homes. Smith insisted that the company wait out the weather.

Rev. Hunt brought peace to an increasingly tension-filled situation, gently imploring his comrades to stay resolute and wait for the winds to become favorable – this despite suffering miserably of seasickness himself.

“Master Hunt, our preacher, was so weak and sick that few expected his recovery,” Captain John Smith would later write in admiration of his valor. “Yet, although he were but 20 miles from his habitation ... and notwithstanding the stormy weather ... all this could never force from him so much as a seeming desire to leave the business.”

Hunt’s courageous example and meek words inspired the crew and the colonists and they determined to stay the course and weather the storm. By early February the winds changed and the journey to the New World was finally underway.

At four o’clock in the morning of April 26, after many weeks at sea, a crewmember spotted land in the distance. After a long and arduous journey, the three small ships entered the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay and set anchor just beyond the Atlantic Ocean. They named the place Cape Henry, after King James’ son, the Prince of Wales.

Before permitting the settlers to continue with the work of looking for a permanent home, Rev. Hunt required that each of the colonists wait on the ships for three days in a time of personal examination and repentance. The journey had been filled with difficulty and in-fighting among the colonists. If they were to consecrate the land for God’s purposes, Hunt wanted the company to be contrite in heart.

Though the ships they sailed upon were very small, The Virginia Company leadership insisted that they carry one item with them from England for the purpose of giving glory to God in the endeavor – a rough-hewn wooden cross. After the three days had passed, Hunt led the party to the wind-swept shore where they erected the seven-foot oak cross in the sand.

The colonists and sailors gathered around the cross, holding the first formal prayer service in Virginia to give thanksgiving for God’s mercy and grace in bringing them safely to this new land.

As they knelt in the sand, Hunt reminded them of the admonition of the British Royal Council, taken from the Holy Scripture: "Every plantation, which my Heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." Raising his hands to heaven, Rev. Robert Hunt claimed the land for country and king and consecrated the continent to the glory of God.

In covenantal language he declared, "...from these very shores the Gospel shall go forth to not only this New World, but the entire world."

Once settled in the fort at Jamestown, the whole company, except those who were on guard, attended regular prayer services twice a day, led by Rev. Hunt in an open air chapel until a permanent church could be erected. Captain Smith described Rev. Hunt as "our honest, religious, and courageous divine."

During his short time as chaplain for the Jamestown colony, Robert Hunt served as a peacemaker, often bring harmony to the quarrelling men.

During the voyage from England, Captain John Smith was jailed on spurious charges raised by Edward-Maria Wingfield. After arriving in the New World, Wingfield and several of his friends insisted that John Smith return with Captain Christopher Newport to England, but the soldier refused to go. Again, Rev. Hunt became an advocate for unity in the colony and for the virtue of Captain John Smith.

Hunt held the respect of the entire company. It was Wingfield, along with their mutual friend and Virginia Company founding member, Rev. Richard Haklyut, who had recruited Hunt for this mission. With the support of Hunt and Captain Newport, Smith was released from his imprisonment and was seated on the Jamestown Council -- a providential move that would later save the colony from extinction thanks to Smith's special military training and leadership abilities.

The chronicler wrote of the parson: "Many were the mischiefs that daily sprung from their ignorant spirits; but the good doctrines and exhortations of our Preacher Minister Hunt reconciled them and caused Captain Smith to be admitted to the Council June 20th. The next day, June 21, third Sunday after Trinity, under the shadow of an old sail, Robert Hunt celebrated the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is impossible to rate too highly the character and work of the aforesaid Robert Hunt, Chaplain of the Colony."

Hunt's virtuous character was well known and respected by his fellow settlers. It was evidenced by his behavior both before and after an accidental fire in the fort in January, 1608. This fire burned the palisades with their arms, bedding apparel, and many private provisions. "Good master Hunt lost all his library," the chronicler wrote, "and all that he had but the clothes on his back, yet none ever did see him repine at his loss... Yet we had daily Common Prayer morning and evening, every Sunday two sermons and every three months the Holy Communion till our Minister died."

Historians believe that Robert Hunt died in the spring of 1608, though the cause remains unknown. Hunt's will, probated in July, 1608, is the only documented evidence of his death.

All authorities, including Edward-Maria Wingfield, first president of the council at Jamestown, and Captain John Smith, who agreed in nothing else, were able to concur in their praise of this worthy man. Smith wrote in memory of Rev. Hunt: "Our factions were oft qualified, and our wants and greater extremities so comforted that they seemed easy in comparison of what we endured after his memorable death..."