

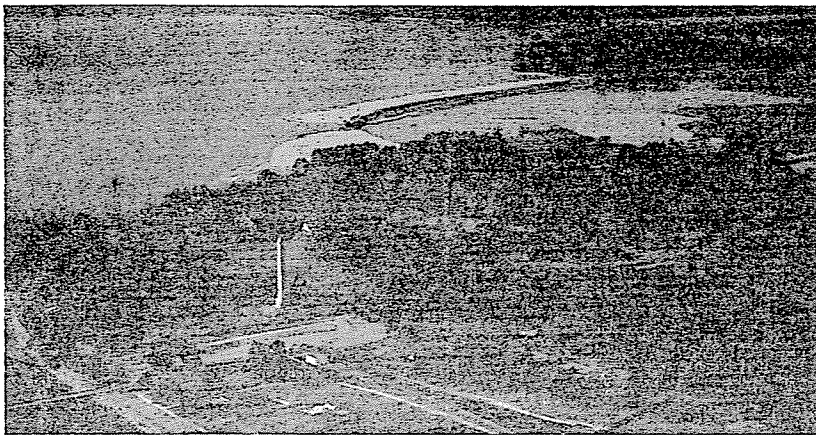
Physicians at Early Jamestown

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Prior to the establishment of the first permanent English settlement in North America at Jamestown, Virginia, on May 13, 1607, attempts had been made by Sir Walter Raleigh and others to found colonies on the coast. Although these early colonizing attempts failed, the explorers had named the territory Virginia in honor of the virgin Queen Elizabeth, and had brought back home such glowing reports about their adventures that the London Company was influenced to organize an expedition to this new country in 1606. Among these earlier unsuccessful explorers was Captain Bartholomew Gilbert. He anchored in the "Chespian Bay in the country of Virginia" in 1603, the year that Queen Elizabeth died, and sent ashore a landing party of five, among whom was the English "surgeon" attached to the fleet. The little party fell into an Indian ambush and perished to a man. If this recorded history is correct, the first English physician to land upon the American continent, and the first to lose his life there in line of duty, was the ship's surgeon, Henry Kenton.

When the ships of the London Company, with their band of 105

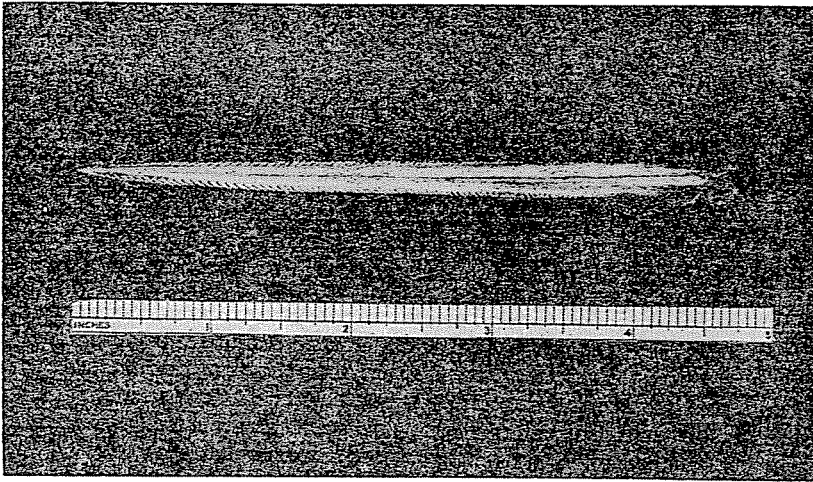


THE SITE OF JAMESTOWN

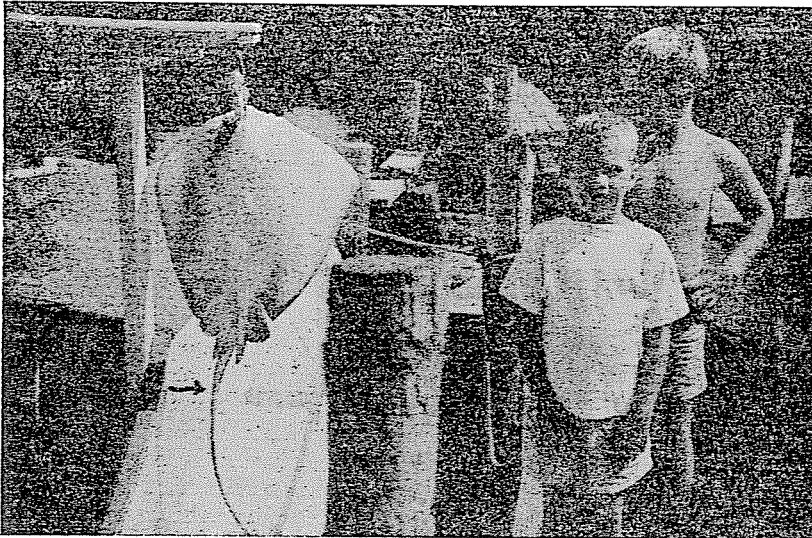
In the Background is Glasshouse Point, the Location of Festival Park — Center for the Jamestown Festival of 1957.

adventuresome colonists, landed in the marshy lowlands on the Virginia coast, there was no physician aboard. If there had been, the London Company's warning, "neither must you plant in a low or moist place because it will prove unhealthful," might have been heeded. This was the Company's fault, however, because it reckoned wrongly. It evidently calculated that wounds and injuries would be the problems of these pioneers — not sickness — so two "chirurgeons" were sent along, Thomas Wotton and Will Wilkinson. They probably were the typical "barber-surgeons" of that day, but of this there is no historical proof. Nothing is known about Wilkinson except that his name was included in the list of planters. Wotton was probably the "gentleman chirurgeon." He was praised highly by Captain John Smith in the summer of 1607 for his "skilled diligence" in treating the illnesses of Smith and two other planters. It is known that Wotton was with the colony for two years. What became of him after that is unknown.

In January of 1608, 120 additional settlers including the first two women colonists "Mistresses Forrest and Anne Buras, her maide," reached Jamestown. They found only forty of the original planters remaining! Fortunately, in this new group, there were a physician (Dr. Walter Russell), a chirurgeon (Post Ginnat), and two apothecaries (Thomas Field and John Harford). They were badly needed and so were the medical supplies which they brought with them. The original colonists had been weakened by their five-month voyage from England and the summer of 1607 had almost wiped out the settlement. Its wretched plight was described by George Percy and originally recorded by Samuel Purchas in 1625: "Our men were destroyed with cruell diseases as swellings, fluxes, burning fevers and by warres, and some departed suddenly, but for the most part they died of meer famine. There were never Englishmen left in a forreigne countrey in such miserie as we were in this newly discovered Virginia. — Our food was but a small can of barlie sod in water, to five men a day, our drinke cold water taken out of the river, which was the destruction of many of our men. Thus we lived in this miserable distress, not having five able men to man our Bulwarkes upon any occassion. If it had not pleased God to have put a terrour in the Savages heart, we had all perished by those wild and cruell Pagans, being in that weake estate as we were: our men night and day groaning in every corner of the Fort most pittiful to heare." Captain John Smith's "True Relation," which is said to be the most important narrative of the earliest Colonial days in America, has this recorded: — "Our extreme toil in bearing and planting pallisadoes, so strained and bruised us, and our continual labor in the extremity of the heat had so weakened us, as were cause sufficient to have made us as miserable in our nature tember— And now where some affirmed it was ill done of the Councel to send forth men so badly provided, this incontradictable reason will shew them



The Barb of a Stingray's Tail. Such a Barb was Responsible for what is Probably America's First Medical Case History.



A Stingray Caught by Dr. Russell V. Bowers of Richmond Near Spot Where Captain Smith Got into Trouble with One. The Boys are John and Daniel Bowers. The Arrow Points to the Barb.

plainly that they are too ill advised to nourish such il conceipts. First the fault of our going was our owne. What could be thought fitting or necessary wee had, but what should wee find, what wee should want, where wee should bee, we were all ignorant, and supposing to make our passage in two months, with victuall to live, and the advantage of the spring to work: we weare at sea 5 monthes, where we both spent our victuall and lost the opportunity of the time and season to plant."

Doctor Walter Russell was the first physician, as distinguished from a chirurgion, to come to this country to live in an established settlement. He contributed the first literary effort of an American physician, the earliest of early American fish stories. It seems he was on an exploring trip in Chesapeake Bay with Captain Smith in June of 1608. "But it chanced," wrote Russell, "the Capitaine taking a fish from his sword (not knowing her condition), being much of the fashion of a Thorne-backe with a longer taile whereon is a most poysoned sting 2 or 3 inches long, which shee stroke and inch and halfe into the wrist of his arme; the which in 4 houres, had so extremely swolne his hand, arme, shoulder and part of his body, as we all with much sorrow concluded his funerall, and prepared his grave in an Ile hard by (as himselfe appointed) which then wee called Stingeray Ile, after the name of the fish. Yet by the helpe of a precious oile, Doctor Russell applyed, ere night his tormenting paine was so well asswaged that he eate the fish to his supper; which gave no less joy and content to us, then ease to himself." Thereby Stingeray Point, near Deltaville, Virginia, got its name.

Russell was not with Smith on the second expedition up the bay later in 1608. Instead, Anthony Bagnall, a surgeon or chirurgion went along — probably because the captain's stingray wound needed surgical rather than medical attention. Not much is known about Bagnall except that he was surgeon at the fort and for settlers at Jamestown and vicinity for a brief period beginning in 1608. Both Doctor Russell and Bagnall could not have been in the colony long because when Captain Smith, the first president of the Virginia Company, was injured by the explosion of some gunpowder in 1609, he had to set sail for England to secure treatment "because there was neither chirurgion or chirurgerye in the fort." The severity of Smith's burn is still a historical question mark — he may have wanted to sidestep the Jamestown brawls and his shaky existence there. His administration was considered a cruel one by his enemies who did all they could to get rid of him.

When Lord Delaware (Thomas West) came to Virginia in June of 1610 to take over where Smith left off, he brought with him a physician and scientist of parts—Dr. Lawrence Bohune. He was the first physician general of the London Company appointed for service in the Jamestown colony. He might be considered the first research scientist to join an



Lord Delaware, Successor of Captain John Smith. Because of America's First Noted Case of Scurvy, He Had to Leave Jamestown in Less than a Year.

established settlement in America. Finding sickness so prevalent and medical supplies dwindling, he began investigating the medicinal properties of such nature plants as sassafras, and rhubarb, and gums of the local trees. His experiments are among the first of a scientific nature to be recorded in the Jamestown colony. Health conditions at the time were so serious that in July of 1610 Lord Delaware wrote the London Company in part as follows: — “. . . Dr. Bohune, whose care and industrie for the preservation of our men's lives (assaulted with strange fluxes and agues), we have just cause to commend unto your noble favours; nor let it, I beseech yee, be passed over as a motion slight and of no moment to furnish us with these things . . . since we have true experience how many men's lives these physicke helps have preserved since our coming, God so blessing the practice and diligence of our doctor, whose store has nowe grown thereby to so low an ebb, as we have not above three weekes physicall provisions.”

Shortly after Lord Delaware's arrival at Jamestown, he became ill. A portion of his report about his several maladies to the London Company is of interest because it describes well the horrible health conditions which must have prevailed generally among the early Virginia colonists. He wrote: “Presently after my arrival in James Towne, I was welcomed by a hote and violent Ague, which held mee a time, till by the advice of my Physition, Doctor Lawrence Bohune (by blood letting), I was recovered. That disease had not long left me, til (within three weeks after I had gotten a little strength) I began to be distempered with other greevous sicknesses, which successively and severally assailed me: for besides a relapse into the former disease, which with more violence held me more than a moneth, and brought me to great weaknesse, the Flux (dysentery) surprised me, and kept me many days; then the Crampe assaulted my weak body, with strong paines; and afterwards the Gout . . . afflicted mee in such sort, that making my body through weaknesse unable to stirre, or to use any manner of exercise, drew me upon the disease called the Scurvy; which though in others it be a sickness of slothfulnesse, yet in me of weaknesse, which never left me, til I was upon the point to leave the world.” Not feeling so well (!) and instead of leaving the world, Lord Delaware left Jamestown in March of 1611 for the West Indies which was then noted for its healthful baths and food. He selfishly took Doctor Bohune with him and the latter probably never got back to Jamestown. The winds didn't blow right so they landed in the Azores where, wrote Lord Delaware, “I found help for my health, and my sickness asswaged by means of fresh diet, and especially of Oranges and Lemonds, an undoubted remedy and medicine for that disease, which lastly, and so long, had afflicted me.” This statement is of special interest because it was not until 1928 that it was definitely proved by Szent-Gyorgi that there was a specific chemical

in citrus juices — now known as ascorbic acid or vitamin C — that would cure scurvy.

Doctor Bohune was known to be a shareholder in the London Company and quite a business man on the side so probably until March of 1622 he was occupied elsewhere. It is definitely recorded, however, that in December of 1621 he was appointed Physician General of the Colony. He set sail for Virginia with 85 immigrants early in 1622. In March, "while nearing the West Indies to obtain water, they fell in with two large ships who feigned to be Hollanders until they had secured the advantage of position, when they broke the Spanish colors and fired upon the English ships. The unequal combat continued for six hours with the most desperate courage on the part of the English; and then they beat off the enemy with the loss of the latter's captain, making their skippers run with blood, coloring the sea in their quarter." Dr. Bohune was killed in this heroic defense while encouraging the crew to resistance. Dr. Wyndham B. Blanton of Richmond, Virginia, the authority on the history of medicine in Virginia, puts it this way: "So perished one of the most colorful of early Virginia doctors, a man of talent, of an investigative nature, full of robust enthusiasm for the sea and for adventure."

The London Company soon appointed Dr. John Pott to succeed Dr. Bohune as physician to the colony of Virginia. He landed in Jamestown in 1622. Dr. Richard Townsend is known to have come along as his apprentice and Joseph Fitch as his apothecary. Dr. Pott, mixing his medicine with politics and business, got into trouble right away. He managed to become Governor of the colony in 1629 but that lasted only a year. Sir John Harvey, his bitter enemy, succeeded him and immediately had Pott arrested for pardoning a murderer, holding cattle not his own and killing hogs belonging to other people. He was convicted of the latter but his sentence was suspended because he "was the only physician in the Colony skilled in epidemical diseases." Mrs. Pott set sail for England and was influential in having her husband pardoned by King Charles. Doctor Pott retired from all public life, moved inland a few miles and built a home which he called "Harrop." The fact that the physician to the Jamestown Colony had chosen this new location seemed a convincing indication of its healthfulness and it wasn't long before a village was built around "Harrop." It was later given the name of Williamsburg.

From the time that Doctor Bohune left the colony in 1611 until Doctor Pott arrived in 1622, there must have been physicians at the Jamestown Colony, but historical records of that day reveal few of their names. It is known that a Reverend Robert Pawlett came to Virginia in 1619 as a preacher, surgeon, and physician but little is known about his activities. There was also a Dr. William Norton who, according to Captain Smith,

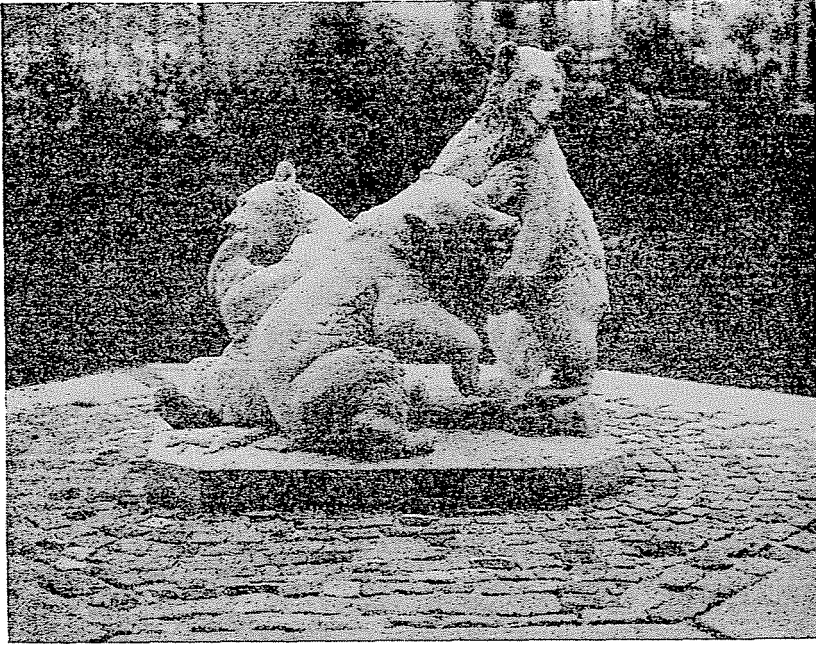
"freely imparted to all gratis, but most bountifully to the poore." He was massacred by the Indians in 1622. Then there was a "Master Cloybourne the Surgian" who arrived in Jamestown in 1621, and Dr. William Rowsley who practised only a short time in the colony. The earliest tombstone record (1618) of a physician who had died in this country was found in Stafford County and marked the burial place of a Dr. Edmond Helder. Nothing is known about his life at Jamestown.

Doctor Blanton in his authoritative book, "Medicine in Virginia in the 17th Century" (The William Byrd Press, Richmond, 1930), has this to say about medicine during the regime of the London Company, which ended in 1624: "Throughout the remaining years of the century Virginia had many physicians and surgeons, most of them home grown, self educated, or products of a local apprenticeship. There were probably none comparable in training and education to the men sent over by the London Company before 1624." In the 1620's, because of this fact, the Jamestown settlers had become fairly well "seasoned" to Virginia vicissitudes and were able to send food supplies to the Plymouth Colony which was having difficulties comparable to those of Captain Smith and his planters in 1607 (The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, April, 1954). According to Dr. Samuel Eliot Morison, Jonathan Turnbull Professor of History at Harvard University, "The first succor the Plymouth Colony had, in their straits of semi-starvation, came from the Jamestown Colony."

Dr. Maurice Bear Gordon, in his comprehensive book, "Aesculapius Comes to the Colonies" (Ventnor Publishers, Inc., Ventnor, N. J., 1949), has devoted much of its introduction to the powerful influences of the Indians on the practice of medicine in early Jamestown days. Their physical drugs included herbs, animal products, leaves and barks. They had empirical remedies, tied in with religion and animal worship, for all their diseases except the contagious ones introduced by the white man. Those exacted a deadly toll. Physicians of earliest colonial days often used successfully the remedies of the Indian medicine men.

It may perhaps be appropriate to close this sketchy article about early Jamestown physicians with the answer to a question which is often asked us at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond about the sculpture, "The Bear Group," which is part of the attractive landscape in the west courtyard of one of the college hospitals. The question for which few know the answer is "Why the bears?" Sculptured by one of the country's leading artists, Mrs. Archer M. Huntington, it symbolizes the Indian medicine man's reverence for the bear, the strongest animal of this continent, a Beast-God to which he appealed for strength and power in the administration of medicine.

Medicine has come a long way since the early days of Jamestown,



The Bear Group at the Medical College of Virginia, Richmond.
Sculptured by Mrs. Archer W. Huntington

thanks to the Indians, to early colonial physicians and to researchers of more modern times. Its development since the founding of this country at Jamestown in 1607, makes one of the thrilling stories of America. It still has many fields to conquer, so we still need to invoke in our prayer gardens something similar to this Zuni Indian ritual:

You are my father, bear,
You are life giving society chief;
Bringing your medicine,
You will make your road come hither.