

American Legal History – Russell

Susan Myra Kinsbury, ed., *The Records of The Virginia Company of London* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906-35), 1:241-47.

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XCIV. John Rolfe. A Letter to Sir Edwin Sandys

January 1619/20

Ferrar Papers.

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List of Records No. 154

Honored Sir

Studieng with my self what service I might doe you, as a token of my grateful remembrance for your many favo^{rs} and constant love shewed me, as well in my absence as when I was present with you I could not at this tyme devise a better, then to giue yo^w notice of some pticulers both of o^r p^rsent estate, and what happened since the departure of the Diana. And though I am well assured, yo^w wilbe satisfied herein more fully by our Governor, yet I desire yo^r kind acceptance of this my poore indeavo^r.

Presently after the Diana hadd her dispatch Sir George Yeardley (according to a Comysson directed unto him and to the Councill of State,) caused Burgesses to be chosen in all place who mett at James City, where all matters therein conteyned were debated by severall Comyttees and approved: and lykewise such other lawes enacted, as were held expedient & requisite for the wellfare and peaceable govern^t of this Comon-weale. Captaine Martines Burgesses for his Plantacon werre not admytted to this Assembly, the reasons I am assured yo^w shall receive from o^r Governo^r, who sendeth home a report of all those pceeding.

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These principall men being at James Citie, Cap^{ten} William Epps (who commandeth Smythes Hundred Company) was arraigned (as neere as might be) according to the lawdable Lawes of England, for killing one Captaine Edward Roecroft als Stallenge. He came hether from the North Colony in a shipp of S^r fferdinando Gorges (as he sayd) for some necessaries w^{ch} he wanted; and to coast along the shoare to fynd and discover what Harbo^{rs} and riu^s he could: but through neglect of the M^r of the shipp and others she was forced a ground in a storme neere Newports Newes, and there sprang so greate a leake, that he could not carry her back againe. This myschance happened through vncivill and vnmanly word vrged by Stallenge (there being no p^rcedent malice) wth w^{ch} Captaine Epps being much moved did strike on the heade wth a sword §in the§ skabberd a such an vnfortunate blowe, that wthin 2. daies he died. The Jury (whereof Capt Lawne was foreman a discreete and vnderstanding man) hearing the Evidence, found him guilty of Manslaughter by Chaunce meddley. The Governo^r fynding him (though young) yet a pper civill gent, and of good hopes, not long after restored him to his Command.

Captaine Henry Spelman being accused by Robte Poole (one of the interpreto^{rs} of the Indian language) of many crimes w^{ch} might be p^riudiciall to the State in generall, and to every mans safety in pticular, receiued Censure at this generall Assembly. But the Governo^r hoping he might redeeme his fault being §pceeding§ much of Childishe ignorance, pdoned the punishm^t [1^b] vpon hope of amendm^t. In triall whereof he was ymployed as interpreto^r to Patawamack to trade for Corne.

Captaine Ward in his shipp went to Monahigon in the No: Colony in May, and returned the latter end of July, wth fishe w^{ch} he caught there. He [He] brought but a smale quantitie, by reason he hadd but little salte. There were some Plymouth shippes where he harbored, who made greate store of fishe, w^{ch} is farr larger then New-land-fishe.

The George was sent by the Cape Marchant (wth the Governo^{rs} consent) to New-found-land to trade and buy fishe for the better releif of the Colony and to make triall of that passage. One other reason (as I take it) was, for that the Magazin was well stoored wth good, it was some what doubtfull, wheth⁹ a shipp would be sent to carry home the cropp so sone as the George might vpon her returne back. She departed hence about the 9th of July, and arriued

here againe about the 10: of Septembr. She [*242] made her passage to Newfound-land in less then 3. weekes, and was at the banck amongst the french fishermen in 14. daies. She came back hether againe in 3. week, wth bare wynd, and brought so much fishe as will make a saving voyadge, w^{ch}, besid the greate releif, giveth much content to the wholl Colony.

The Sturgeon shipp and the Triall departed hence togeth⁹ about the fiue of July. Mr Pountys hath taken greate paines in fishing, and toward Michellmas (the weather being somewhat temperate) made some good sturgeon. He hopeth by the spring to be better fitted, wth Cellars and houses, and to do some good therein.

The Cattle in the Triall came exceeding well, and gaue the Colony much ioy and greate encouragem^t. Both they horses and Mares wilbe very vendible here a long tyme, the Colony increasing wth people as of late.

About the latter end of August, a Dutch man of Warr of the burden of a 160 tunes arriued at Point-Comfort, the Comandor^s name Capt Jope, his Pilott for the West Indies one Mr Marmaduke an Englishman. They mett wth the Trer in the West Indyas, and determyned to hold consort shipp hetherward, but in their passage lost one the other. He brought not any thing but 20. and odd Negroes, w^{ch} the Governor^r and Cape Marchant bought for victualle (whereof he was in greate need as he p^rtended) at the best and easyest rate they could. He hadd a lardge and ample Comyssion from his Excellency to range and to take purchase in the West Indyas.

Three or 4. daies after the Trer arriued. At his arriuall he sent word p^rsently to the Gou⁹no^r to know his pleasure, who wrote to him, and did request myself Leiften^ante Peace and Mr Ewens to goe downe to him, to desyre [2^a] him to come vp to James Cytie. But before we gott downe he hadd sett saile and was gone out of the Bay. The occasion hereof happened by the vnfrendly dealing of the Inhitante of Keqnoughton, for he was in greate want of victualle, wherewth they wold not relieve him nor his Company vpon any termes. He reported (whilst he staid at Keqnoughton) thit if wee gott not some Ord'nance planted at Point Comfort, the Colony would be quyte vndone and that ere long: for that vndoubtedly [*244] the Spanyard would be here the next §spring§ wch he gathered (as was sayd) from some Spanyarde in y^e West Indyas. This being spread abroad doth much disharten the people ingenerrall. ffor wee haue no place of strength to retreate vnto, no shipping of c⁹teynty (wch would be to vs as the wodden walles of England) no sound and experienced souldyers to

vndertake, no Engineers and arthmen to erect worke, few Ordenance, not a serviceable carriage to mound them on; not Amunyon of powder, shott and leade, to fight ~~and~~ 2. wholl dayes, no not one gunner belonging to the Plantacon, so ye^r Hono^{rs} o^r soveraignes dignity, yo^r hono^{rs} o^r poore reputacons §lives§ and labo^{rs} thus long spent lieth too open to a suddayne, and to an inevitable hazard, if a forroigne enemy oppose against §vs§. Of this I cannot better doe, to giue yo^w full satisfaccon, then to referr yo^w to the iudgem^t and opynion of Capt Argallwho hath often spoken ~~and~~ herof during his goverm^t, and knoweth (none better) these defect .

About the begynnyng of Septemb^r J-apazous (the King of Patawamack brother) comes to James Cyty to the Governo^r. Amongst other frivoulous messag he requested, that 2. shippes might be speedily to Patawamack where they should trade for greate stoore of corne. Herevpon (according to his desyre) the Governo^r sent an Englishman wth him by land, and in the

beginning of October, Capt Ward shipp and Somer-Iselande frigate departed James Cyty hether-ward.

Robte Poole being wholly ymployed by the Governo^r of message to the greate King, pswaded S^r George, that if he would send Pledge he would, would come to visite him. O^r Corne and Tobacco being in greate abundance in o^r grounde (for a more plentyfull yeere then this, it hath not pleased God to send vs since the beginning of this Plantacon, yet very contagious for sycknes, whereof many [2^b] both old and new men died) the Governo^r sent two men vnto him, who were returned wth frivoulous aunsweres, sayng he never hadd any intent to come vnto him. The Gou^ono^r being iealous of them (the rath^o because wee hadd many stragglng Plantacons, much weakened by the greate mortality, Poole lykewise proving very dishonest) requested Captaine William Powell and myself (for Opachankano pfesseth much love to me, and giueth much credite to my word) to goe in a shalopp unto Pomonkey ryver; wch wee did. Going vp that [*245] ryver wthin 5. myles of his house wee sent Capt Spelman and Tho: Hobson vnto him wth the Govern^{rs} message. The shipp and frigate (being not farr out of their way to Patawamack) went in the night about 12. myles into the riu^o, and wee hasting vpp wth o^r shalopp, the messengers were wth Opaihankano, before or asone as any newes came to him eyther of the shippes or o^r arriual, wch much daunted them and ptt them in greate feare. Their intertaym^t at the first was harshe, (Poole being even turned heathen) but after their message was delyuered, it was kindly taken, they sent away

lovingly, and Poole accused and Condemned by them, as an instrum^t that sought all the meanes he could to breake o^r league. They seemed also to be very weary of him. Sh^h Opachankano much wondered I would not goe to him, but (as I wished the messengers) they said I was syck of an ague, wherewth they was were satisfied. Wee hadd no order to bring Poole away, nor to make any shew of discontent to him, for feare he should pswade them to some myscheif in o^r corne feilde, hoping to gett him away by fayre meanes. So wee returned in greate love and amyty to the greate content of the Colony, wch before liued in dayly hazard, all messag being vntruly delyu⁹ed by Poole on both side.

The Chikahomynies come not at vs, but wee receyue no damage by them.

The Governo^r hath bounded the lymytt of the 4. Cerporacons the Companies, the Governo^{rs}, the Vniversity and Glebe lande according to the Comysson.

[3^a] All the Ancient Planters being sett free haue chosen place for their dividend according to the Comysson. Wch giueth all greate content, for now knowing their owne land, they strive and are p^rpared to build houses §&§ to cleere their ground ready to plant, wch giveth the * * * greate encouragem^t, and the greatest hope to make the Colony florrish that ever yet happened to them.

Vpon the 4. of November the Bona Noua arriued at James Cyty. All the passengers came lusty and in good health. They came by the west Indydes, w^{ch} passage at that season doth much refreshe the people.

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The proporcon⁹ of Victualle brought for those 100 men fell so short, that Captaine Welden and M^r Whitakere were forced (notwthstanding o^r plenty) to putt out 50. or thereabout for a yere, by the Governo^{rs} and Councelle advise. ffor whom they are to receyue the next yere, 3. barrell of corne and 55II of tobacco for a man; w^{ch} their sicknes considered (for seldom any escapeth little or much) is more then hey of themselues could ue⁹ gett. By this meanes the next yere, they wilbe instructed to pceed in their owne busynes and be well instructed to teache new-comers. Wth the remaynder (being about 25. a peece, the one is seated wth one Capt Mathewes 3.myles beyond Henrico for his owne securytie, and to his greate content. And M^r Whithakers wthin 4. myles of James Cyty on the Companies land.

Vpon Saterdag the 20th of November at night Mr Ormerod died at James Cytie, after a long and tedious sicknes, the cheif occasion the flux, wch of late hath much rained amongst vs. His death is generally much the Colony receyving hereby a greate loss, being a man of so good life, learnyng & carriadge as his fellow here he left not behind him.

One Mr Darmer a gent sent out by the Plymouth Company arriued about the end of September in a smale bottome of 7. or 8. tuñes, he hadd coasted from Monah/*ucon*/to o^r Plantacon, and found an Inland sea to the No: of vs. The depth whereof he could not search for want of meanes, and wyneter comyng on. He is fitting his smale vessell, and purposeth this spring to make a new tryall.

Capt. Lawne at his arriuall seated himself in Wareskoyack Bay wth Company, but by his owne sycknes and his peoples (wherein there was improvidency) he quytted his Plantacon, went vpp to Charles Cyty, and about Novemb^r died. So his peict is lykely (vnles better followed and well seconded) to come to nothing.

Smythes Hundred people are seated [are seated] at Dauncing Point, most convenyent place wthin their lymitte. There hath bene much sycknes amongst them: so y^t this yere no matter of gaine or of greate industry can be expected from them.

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Martynes Hundred men seated at Argall towne wth good & convenyent houses haue done best of all New-Comers. Many who were industrious having reaped good cropps, but most not of equall spiritt and industrious haue less, yet exceeded other New-Comers. Many of these haue also died by sycknes, but not ~~comparab~~ comparable to other place.

About the latter e begynning of Decemb^r Capt Ward wth his shipp and the frigate came from Patawamack. Japasons hadd dealt falsely wth them, for they could gett little trade, so that they brought not aboue 800 bushell, the most pte whereof they tooke by force from Jupasons Country who deceyued them, and a smale quantyty they traded for. But in conclusion being very peaceable wth all the oth⁹ Indyans, at their departure they also made a firme peace againe wth Japazons.

At this tyme also came Captaine Woodiff in a smale shipp of Bristow, who brought his people very well, and made his passag^e in tenn week .

Thus ~~ffarr~~ farr as pte of my duty (ever ready at yo^r service) haue I breifly made knowen vnto yo^w, some ptyculers of o^r estate: and wthall in conclusion cannot chose but reveale vnto yo^w the sorrow I conceyve, to heare of the many accusacons heaped vpon Captaine Argall, wth whom my reputacon hath bene vniustly joynted [4^a] but I am pswaded he will aunswere well for himself. Here haue also bene divers deposycons taken and sent home by the Diana, I will tax no man therein: but when it shall come to farther triall, I assure yo^w that yo^w shall fynd many dishonest and faithles men to Captaine Argall, who haue receyued much kindnes at his hand & to his face will contradict, and be ashamed of much, wch in his absence they haue intymated against him. Lastly, I speake on my owne experience for these 11. yeres, I neuer amongst so few, haue seene so many falseharted, envious and malicious people (yea amongst some who march in the better ranck) nor shall yo^w ever §heare§ of any the iustest Governo^r here, who shall liue free, from their scandalle and shameles exclamacons, if way be given to their report . And so desyring yo^r kind acceptance hereof, being vnwilling to conceale any thing from yo^rselfe (who now, to myne and many others comfort , standeth at the helme to guide vs and bring vs to ~~o^r~~the Port of o^r best happynes, wch of late wee say principally by yo^r goodnes wee now inioy) eyther wch yo^w may [*248] be desyrous to vnderstand or wch may further yo^w for the advauncem^t of this Christian Plantacon I take my leave, and will ever rest

At yo^r service and commaund in all faithfull dutyes

Jo: Rolf.

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