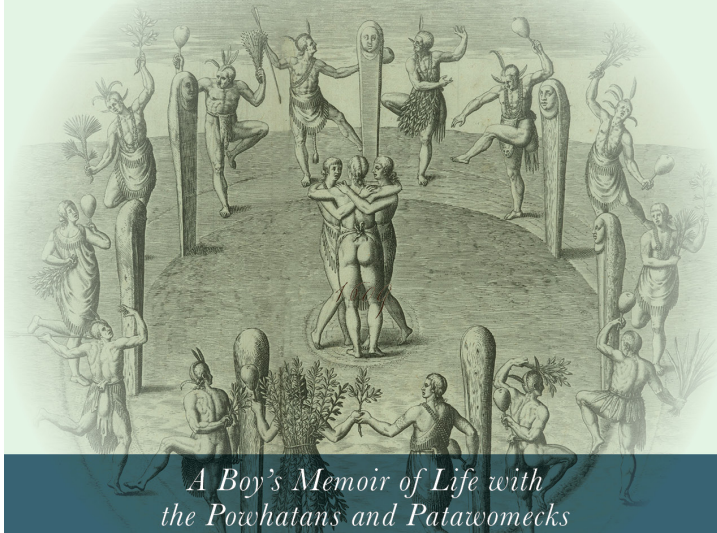


RELATION OF VIRGINIA



*A Boy's Memoir of Life with
the Powhatans and Patawomecks*

Henry Spelman

TRANSCRIBED FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT, EDITED,
AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

KAREN ORDAHL KUPPERMAN

96 pages | Cloth | 978-1-4798-3519-5

Memoir | Colonial History

Relation of Virginia

A Boy's Memoir of Life with
the Powhatans and the
Patawomecks

BY HENRY SPELMAN

EDITED BY KAREN ORDAHL KUPPERMAN

Instructor's Guide

"Being in displeasure of my friends, and desirous to see other countries, after three months sail we come with prosperous winds in sight of Virginia." So begins the fascinating tale of Henry Spelman, a 14-year-old boy whose mother sent him to Virginia in 1609. One of Jamestown's early arrivals, Spelman soon became an integral player, and sometimes a pawn, in the power struggle between the Chesapeake Algonquians and the English settlers.

Shortly after he arrived in the Chesapeake, Henry accompanied another English boy, Thomas Savage, to Powhatan's capital and after a few months accompanied the Patawomeck chief Iopassus to the Potomac. Spelman learned Chesapeake Algonquian languages and customs, acted as an interpreter, and knew a host of colonial America's most well-known figures, from Pocahontas to Powhatan to Captain John Smith. This remarkable manuscript tells Henry's story in his own words, and it is the only description of Chesapeake Algonquian culture written with an insider's knowledge. Spelman's account is lively and violent, rich with anthropological and historical detail.

A valuable and unique primary document, this book illuminates the beginnings of English America and tells us much about how the Chesapeake Algonquians viewed the English invaders. It provides the first transcription from the original manuscript since 1872.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Instructor's Guide – 3

Discussion Questions – 6

BOOK BREAKDOWN

Henry Spelman was fourteen years old when he arrived in England's recently-founded Jamestown colony in 1609. Many English boys were sent to serve in America and several, like Henry, were placed with Chesapeake Algonquian leaders to learn the language and culture from the inside. We know something about their experiences because they were mentioned in leaders' reports and some colonists' letters. But Henry Spelman made a great contribution because he composed an insider's account of the Native people he lived with and their culture.

Henry Spelman's *Relation* is a work in progress. He was briefly back in London in 1611 when he was sixteen, and his uncle, the eminent scholar Sir Henry Spelman, had him write down what he had learned. He began with an intriguing first sentence mentioning that his "friends" had been displeased with him. In those days the word friends included family and other supporters, so if Henry had done something illegal or immoral, they may have pulled strings to get him on the Virginia-bound fleet. He also wrote that he wanted to see other countries and he had plenty of adventures in what the English called the Newfound land.

After these preliminaries, Spelman turned to his experiences. After a week in Jamestown, Capt. John Smith presented him to Parahunt, whom Henry called the Little Powhatan. The Great Powhatan, Parahunt's father, ruled over most of the tribes in the region. Henry soon left Parahunt, even though the boys were not free to come and go as they pleased. Soon, Thomas Savage, who had been given to the Great Powhatan the year before, came to the fort with an embassy. Thomas pleaded not to have to go back to the Powhatans' capital city alone, so Henry Spelman was appointed to accompany Thomas back and they lived together with Powhatan for the next few months.

The boys' status was unclear. Although Powhatan called them his sons and they lived in his household, he used them for his own purposes just as the English did. Henry began his account of this phase of his life with an episode in which Powhatan sent him to Jamestown with a false message saying that if colonists came with copper, the Powhatans would fill their ships with corn, which the men in Jamestown badly needed. In reality, it was a trap and the English were killed. Powhatan had sent Henry away, so he did not witness the slaughter.

The manuscript shows how Henry struggled with this episode. At first he wrote a very brief version, but then he put an extended description of what happened at the end of the memoir and this version also has many cross-outs and insertions showing he still was not able to render these deeply disturbing events easily. As life became increasingly uncomfortable with Powhatan, Henry and Thomas accepted the invitation of Iopassus, a visiting Patawomeck chief from the Potomac River up north. The ensuing flight, Thomas's defection, and their pursuit by armed Powhatans who killed one of the

fleeing party, again made for challenging storytelling.

Henry wrote that he lived in Iopassus's household for more than a year until Capt. Samuel Argall came into the Potomac looking for food as usual, and also looking for "an English boy named Harry". Henry again had difficulty writing about his ransom and parting with Iopassus and the Patawomecks.

After his history of events in his early life in Virginia, Henry turned to the Chesapeake Algonquians' culture and life. He began with religion, and he carefully distinguished between Powhatan and Patawomeck practices. He concentrated on religious practices he had seen, including priests' curing rituals. He did not write much on religious beliefs in the memoir, but he was interviewed by William Strachey and Samuel Purchas and told them what he had learned about the Patawomecks' creation story and about what happens to people after they die.

In his discussion of village life, relations within the family, and activities such as hunting and preparing and consuming food, Henry paid a great deal of attention to gender roles, describing what both women and men contributed to the life of the community. In a break from the style in the rest of this part of the manuscript, he was distracted into describing how one of Iopassus's wives bullied him into a fight with her. He described the dignity of Native chiefs and the great respect the people showed to them even though they did not live or dress differently from anyone else.

Henry's description of Virginia's Native cultures was not infallible. He included a description of a ritual called the Huskenaw in which he believed some Native boys were executed. Other reports a few years later corrected that interpretation, which had been spread by several people. In reality it was a coming of age ceremony from which the boys emerged as adults. Henry said his youth prevented him from understanding some aspects of Native government, and this applied to his grasp of some religious practices as well. He was much better placed to understand daily life and how villages functioned.

Henry Spelman returned to Virginia in 1612 with new confidence because his uncle had arranged a better status for him. He acted as interpreter for the colony and he was selected to accompany Pocahontas and her husband John Rolfe on an embassy to London in 1616. Pocahontas had been captured by Capt. Argall in 1613 and had been converted to Christianity. She married John Rolfe and they had a son, Thomas, and the Virginia Company decided to bring her to London to show off this major accomplishment. The party included Uttamattomakin, the Powhatans' chief priest, and Henry interpreted as best as he could over several nights as Uttamattomakin conversed with English scholars who wanted to know as much about Chesapeake Algonquian religion as they could.

Pocahontas died as her party prepared for the return voyage, but Henry Spelman returned to Virginia again in 1617. Apparently, he had not had a chance to return to his memoir and add more about his experiences. Changes among the Powhatans and in the colony made his status less secure and at the first meeting of the new Virginia Assembly in 1619, he was accused and convicted of having carried treasonous messages to Opechancanough, who had succeeded to the chiefdom after Powhatan's retirement and death. Henry's translation skills were still in demand and he continued to act as interpreter until the colony's equilibrium was overturned by a massive attack on all the settlements on March 22, 1622. He was killed, at the age of 28, a year later in the fighting that followed the great attack.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Henry Spelman as Observer

- Why did Chesapeake Algonquian leaders accept English boys into their communities?
- Were they less threatening than adult men? What did they expect in return?
- What parts of Powhatan and Patawomeck life was Henry able to see from the inside? How much of this would a soldier like Capt. John Smith have had access to?
- Did he misinterpret some of what he experienced because he was so young? Or did he understand some things better because of his youth?
- How sympathetic was Henry's description of the people with whom he lived? Do you think he really understood what he was seeing?
- Would English readers have been surprised at Henry's description of how Powhatan used the crown sent him by King James?

Henry Spelman's experiences

- Was Henry a guest, a servant, or a captive with Powhatan and Iopassus?
- Why did Powhatan send armed men to bring Henry back when he left with Iopassus?
- Why did Iopassus treat Henry so well after his fight with the chief's wife?
- Why does Henry not mention Pocahontas? She would have been present in Orapax when he lived there, and Captain John Smith said she saved his life. Was it because she was not yet well known in England at the time he wrote?
- How does Henry present the gendered distinctions of labor and life in Chesapeake Algonquian societies?
- What do you think Henry's life would have been like if Captain Argall had not found him with Iopassus and ransomed him?

Henry Spelman as Reporter

- Do you think the categories into which Henry divided his *Relation* were his own idea? Or did his scholarly uncle dictate them? What kinds of topics did he leave out?

- Why were English intellectuals so interested in learning about Henry's experiences and what he could tell about Chesapeake Algonquian cultures? How did his report fit into larger scientific and scholarly issues of his time?
- What do you think about the differences in the Patawomeck creation story as told by Samuel Purchas and William Strachey? Do you think English writers may have reworked what they were told to make it into what they considered a coherent account?

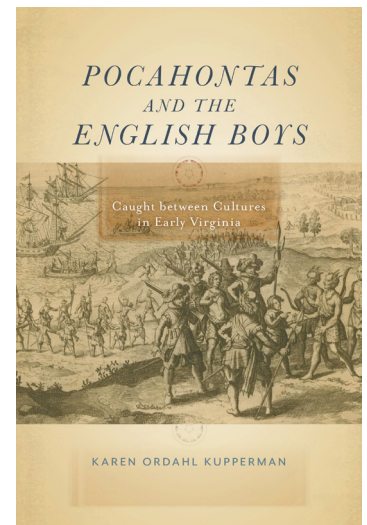
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Pocahontas and the English Boys

Caught between Cultures in Early Virginia

BY KAREN ORDAHL KUPPERMAN

The captivating story of four young people—English and Powhatan—who lived their lives between cultures



240 pages | Cloth | \$24.95

978-1-4798-2582-0

History | Colonial History

In *Pocahontas and the English Boys*, the esteemed historian Karen Ordahl Kupperman shifts the lens on the well-known narrative of Virginia's founding to reveal the previously untold and utterly compelling story of the youths who, often unwillingly, entered into cross-cultural relationships—and became essential for the colony's survival. Their story gives us unprecedented access to both sides of early Virginia.

Here for the first time outside scholarly texts is an accurate portrayal of Pocahontas, who, from the age of ten, acted as emissary for her father, who ruled over the local tribes, alongside the never-before-told intertwined stories of Thomas Savage, Henry Spelman, and Robert Poole, young English boys who were forced to live with powerful Indian leaders to act as intermediaries.

Pocahontas and the English Boys is a riveting seventeenth-century story of intrigue and danger, knowledge and power, and four youths who lived out their lives between cultures. As Pocahontas, Thomas, Henry, and Robert collaborated and conspired in carrying messages and trying to smooth out difficulties, they never knew when they might be caught in the firing line of developing hostilities. While their knowledge and role in controlling communication gave them status and a degree of power, their relationships with both sides meant that no one trusted them completely.

Written by an expert in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Atlantic history, *Pocahontas and the English Boys* unearths gems from the archives—Henry Spelman's memoir, travel accounts, letters, and official reports and records of meetings of the governor and council in Virginia—and draws on recent archaeology to share the stories of the young people who were key influencers of their day and who are now set to transform our understanding of early Virginia.