



MANAKIN TOWN

The French Huguenot Settlement in Virginia

1700-ca. 1750

Many French Huguenots (Protestants), fleeing religious persecution in Catholic France, emigrated to America via England, which granted them tracts of frontier land to settle. One such settlement was Manakin Town in Virginia, created in 1700 on the James River near present-day Richmond. From about 400 original settlers, the town had fewer than 150 by 1705, as the newcomers went to live on their farms instead of the town, and as their children became assimilated into the English culture. By 1750 the town no longer existed. Presented here are four documents that illustrate the hardships and successes of Manakin Town's first years.



Giles Robert de Vaugondy, *Carte de la Virginie et du Maryland 1755*, details;
Manakin Town marked on detail above

Petition of the French refugees to the governor of Virginia, 1700 requesting aid and supplies for the new arrivals (excerpts)

“the most deplorable condition of the French Refugees now under your protection”

This humble supplication, by underwritten petitioners, in the name and behalf of all the French Refugees arrived in Virginia, along with Monsieur De Joux, as also in the behalf of the greater part of the French Refugees who Landed here both before and since to settle themselves in a Colony —

Showeth . . . That whereas the King’s most Excellent Majesty, out of his gracious good will and pleasure, hath granted the French Refugees a Liberty to Settle a Colony in Virginia, His Majesty for the encouragement of that design hath given Three thousand pounds Sterling to defray the charges of 500 persons in crossing the seas and to relieve their own necessities.

In compliance with his Majesty’s Order, the Marquis de la Muze, and Monsieur De Saily and several other French Refugees, to the number of about 200 persons, embarked themselves last April for Virginia, publishing and giving out that they sailed thither to put themselves in a capacity to receive such of their brethren as should afterwards imitate their Example

About two months after the first embarkment, there departed a second [ship], bound to the same place, consisting of about 150 Refugees, among whom was Monsieur De Joux, sent along with them to exercise

National Humanities Center, 2008: nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds. (1-3) Petition, Nicholson report, and Byrd description in R. A. Brock, *Documents, Chiefly Unpublished, Relating to the Huguenot Emigration to Virginia* . . . (Richmond, Virginia, 1886; reprint by Genealogical Publ. Co., 1962/66/73/79/95/98); permission pending. (4) Michel description in William J. Hinke, ed., trans., “Report of the Journey of Francis Louis Michel from Berne, Switzerland, to Virginia, October 2, 1701–December 1, 1702,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 24:1-2 (January/April 1916), pp. 122-124. Spelling and punctuation modernized, and some paragraphing added by NHC for clarity. Complete image credits at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/imagecredits.htm.

his pastoral function as Minister of all the said Colony, and who for that end was admitted into holy orders by my Lord Bishop of London.

These last having landed at Jamestown, understood to their great joy and satisfaction how graciously your Excellency received the first party in letting them feel the effects of your bounty and generosity so many way, and particularly in allotting them for their settlement one of the best tracts of land in the whole country, but to which there is no passing by water, as being 25 miles at least above the falls of James River.

But so far was the second party of French Refugees from receiving that aid and assistance, they proposed to themselves from the first, that on the contrary it was no small surprise there to understand that more than one half of the first party lay sick at the falls [on the James River], languishing under misery and want, notwithstanding the considerable supplies that the Sieurs De la Muce and De Sailly received, both from your Excellency and from the Country, as also that a great number of 'em was dead, and that so many of 'em as repaired [departed] to their new settlement were in a distressed condition and in great disorder, complaining of the hard-heartedness of De Sailly, and speaking of him as of one whose conduct was odious and insupportable.

It was a considerable surprise that instead of seeing this second party kindly received by Mr. De Sailly, and admitted to have a share in those charitable supplies he had in his hands and in those he had received from the country, his answer, on the contrary, to such as addressed him for relief was, That he had no bread nor sustenance for 'em. Nay, further, he opposed those who desired to take up such tracts of land as were adjacent to the Lands he had marked out for those of his first party, unless they would swear an oath of fidelity to such particular persons as he had made Justices of the Peace, which oaths those of the second party refused to take, being fully persuaded they lay under no obligation so to do.

Being, therefore, destitute of all hopes of obtaining provision and relief from Mon'r De Sailly, they hindered Monsieur De Joux in his design [plan] of delivering up into the hands of De Sailly those goods with which Messieurs Jaquean, Belet and their company entrusted him. And having had sufficient trial of the said Mons[ieur] De Joux's integrity and affection towards them, they requested him to use his utmost care and diligence in procuring some sustenance for 'em and some lands, which they might labor, sow and improve in hopes that God's blessing upon their endeavors may give 'em some subsistence for the future without being burdensome to the country And this what the said De Joux has done with so much success by his mediation with those magistrates that ruled the country in your Excellency's absence, that we have had such supplies as have almost hitherto relieved our necessities.

At the same time the said De Joux has, by your Excellency's permission, and to our common satisfaction, shared out among us the Lands we are now clearing, in order to our future subsistence.

For these, and several other weighty considerations, we humbly supplicate and Petition your Excellency, not only in our own behalf, but also in the behalf of the French refugees that arrived here first along with the Sieurs De la Muce and De Sailly, and in the behalf of the third Party that arrived last of all, and are now dispersed about Jamestown, to grant us these following articles:

- 1st.** That it may please your Excellency, in continuing your charitable disposition towards your Petitioners, to be instrumental in procuring food and sustenance for them, with other things necessary for their subsistence, till they are in capacity to live by the fruits of their own labors.
- 2^d.** And because that tract of Land your Excellency allotted to the French Refugees is so remote from the English plantation [settlement], and that there is no carrying of things by water, Your Petitioners being likewise destitute of all necessaries for transporting things by land, and being otherwise unable to attend such postages without neglecting their other labors more than one-half of the year, they do therefore petition your Excellency to order that such supplies as you will procure for their said subsistence may be carried and transported gratis [free] to the hithermost frontiers of their plantations.
- 3^d.** And being that your petitioners can have no prospect of any good livelihood in planting of tobacco, and that they cannot expect to be able in a short time to drive a trade in wings, flax, Silk and hemp, and other effects of their industry, which they aim at, and which cannot turn to any good account till after some years are past, during which they will want many things necessary for their comfortable living, They therefore petition your Excellency to use your interest with the King's Majesty in

procuring some encouragements for their labors, and in endeavoring to obtain of his Majesty, for some years at least, a comfortable subsistence for the Ministry among them.

- 4th. They it may please your Excellency to order Monsieur De Saily to disburse to the above mentioned Colony the sum of Thirty Pounds Sterling out of the 230£ Sterling designed for the building of a church, without ornaments, a house for the Minister and a magazine [storehouse] to lay up fresh goods in, as shall be found to belong to the said Colony in Common till it is in a condition to build a decent and convenient church. That the said 30 Pounds be paid down by Monsieur De Saily to Monsieur Do Joux for the said purpose. That the said Church be built in such a place as Monsieur de Joux shall think proper and convenient for the exercise of his ministerial function.
- 5th. And because the said Monsieur De Saily (though he has in his custody all the money that has been given to the Colony for its subsistence), has refused to afford it any further relief or sustenance, under pretense that he hath no more money, not excepting so much as the above sum of 230£ Sterling, designed for the building of the Church. Therefore your petitioners do beseech your Excellency to order that the said De Saily may, as soon as possible, give an account before such auditors as your Excellency shall nominate, how he has employed and laid out all the money he has received, as well in London as in this Government, for the use of the said Colony.
- 6th. That the remaining sum which Monsieur De Saily shall be found indebted in after he has made up his account, whether it be in money or goods, may be deposited in the hands of your Excellency, or of such Commissioners as your Excellency shall make choice of, that so it may be preserved for the supplying of the urgent necessities of the Colony.
- 7th. It being impossible to keep the said Colony in any good order without Magistrates, as being at too long a distance from the English to receive necessary justice from them, the said Colony doth therefore petition your Excellency to give them liberty to choose such a number of Judges for a time, at least, as shall be thought necessary for determining all Civil causes, and that the said Judges be chosen by the people out of the number of those whose catalogue shall be presented by Monsieur De Joux. That the Judgments which shall be passed by the said Judges in Civil causes may be liable to an appeal to the courts next adjacent to the Manakin Town, excepting when the sum in controversy doth not exceed three pounds sterling.
- 8th. To prevent the dissolution of the said Colony, your petitioners do beseech your Excellency to give strict order to the English to entertain none of the French without permission, and that such French as shall desert their new settlement be ordered to restore the 5£ Sterling paid for their passage, as also the goods which they received and belong to say Colony.
- 9th. That Monsieur La Sosée, physician to the said Colony, be ordered to return again thither and carry back with him all the medecins and instruments that the Colony had entrusted him with.

Your Petitioners do most humbly supplicate your Excellency to take into your serious consideration the most deplorable condition of the French Refugees now under your protection, and to grant them the above mentioned favors, and such other reliefs as your Excellency out of your singular goodness shall thing fit to bestow upon them. And they will always pray to God for the preservation of your person and for the prosperity and glory of your government.

D. Bleüet	Francois Gannard	Ettienne Chabran	Michael Michell
Jacque Corbelose	Jean Levillanà	LaBarr Eabuyt	Jean Arnaut
P. Zossard	Jean Aboàsson	Abraham Foy	J. Hagault
N. Mare	Théodore Duronsau	Francois Delhapiel	Josue Petit
David Menetres	Pierre Rivers	P. Labady	Jean Rugon
Daulegre	Jean Riviol	Paul Caftes	Elie Gullature
Souan	Jean Mearyut	Moise Verrüeil	Poussite
P. Baudry, p.	Pierre Leluells	Brault	S. Augustin
Anthoine de Ramberge	L. Robàll	Jacob Capon	

Report of the Virginia governor on the French refugees, 1700

Gov. Francis Nicholson submitted his report to English Board of Trade in August 1700.

“they would be strengthening to the Frontiers and would quickly make a settlement”

The 24th of the last month, I had the good Fortune of receiving his Majesty's Royal Commands of March the 18th [1700], sent me by your Lordship, concerning the Marquis de la Muce, Mons'r [Monsieur] de Saily, and other French Protestant Refugees; and I beg leave to assure your Lordship that as I have, so I will endeavor to obey them (they were on board the ship *Mary and Ann*, of London, George Haws, Commander, who had about 13 weeks passage, and the 23rd of the last month arrived at the mouth of this River), and upon receipt of them, I immediately went down to Kickotan to give directions in order to their coming hither, some of whom Came on Sunday in the evening, the rest of the next day.

I wrote to Col. Byrd and Col. Harrison to meet them here, which they did, and we concluded that there was no settling them in Norfolk nor thereabouts, because esteemed an unhealthful place, and no vacant land, except some that is in dispute now betwixt us and No. Carolina: So we thought it would be best for them to go to a place about twenty miles above the Falls of James River, commonly called the Manikin Town.

There is a great deal of good Land and unpatented, where they may at present be all together, which we thought would be best for all his Majesty's Service and Interests, and that they would be strengthening to the Frontiers and would quickly make a settlement, not only for themselves, but to receive others when his majesty shall be graciously pleased to send them. They may be prejudicial to his Majesty's interest and Service, vizt. [such as], by living long together and using their own language and customs, and by going upon such manufactures and handicraft Trades as we are furnished with from England; but according to duty, I shall endeavor to regulate these affairs, and when, please God, the Council meets, I shall lay before them the matters relating to these Refugees. On Tuesday I mustered them, and No. 1 [first of several enclosures with the report] is a copy of the List of them. Col. Byrd went before them in order to meet them at the Falls of this River, where he formerly lived, to dispose of them thereabouts, till they can get houses or sheds in the place for their Reception, and he promised to go along with the Marquis and Mons'r de Saily to show them the Land.

The people [current residents] at present seem to be very well affected towards them, and to commiserate their condition, and some who have seen them have given them money, viz: Col. Harrison, 5£; Mr. Commissary Blaire, the like Sum. The Reverend Mr. Stephen Touaie, thereabouts; Mr. Benjamin Harrison, 5£; Mr. Attorney General Fowler, something, as likewise Mr. William Edwards, Merchant of this place. I am apt to think that Several Gentlemen and others will be charitable to them. They went from hence yesterday.

If his majesty be graciously pleased to send over more, I humbly propose that Mr. Micajah Perry, merchant of London, may be spoken with about their passage hither, and that they may have their passage on board the Ships which come to the upper parts of James River, which is the highest place to their settlement, and that there may not above 40 or 50 come in any one Ship: So they may be better accommodated in all respects, for I have observed that when Ships that come into these parts, are crowded with people, 'tis very prejudicial to their health; some getting sicknesses, which not seldom prove catching, some die on board, and others soon after that come on shore.

Your Lordship's dutiful and faithful humble servant.

FRS. NICHOLSON.

Report on Manakin Town, by William Byrd, May 1701

William Byrd, a wealthy and influential plantation owner in Virginia, is the Colonel Byrd mentioned in the governor's report of 1700.

“Tho’ these people are very poor, yet they seem very cheerful.”

10 and 11th May, 1701.

The 10th of May last, I with Colonel Randolph, Capt. Epes, Capt. Webb, &c., went up to the new settlements of the French Refugees at the Manakan Town. We visited about seventy of their huts, being, most of them, very mean [minimal]; there being upwards of forty of them betwixt the two Creeks, which is about four miles along on the [James] River, and have cleared all the old Manacan [Indian] fields for near three miles together, as also some others (who came thither last February, as Blackman told us) have cleared new grounds toward the Lower Creek, and had done more work than they yet went thither first.

They have, all of them, some Garden trade and have planted corn, but few of them had broke up their ground or weeded the same, whereupon I sent for most of them and told them they must not expect to enjoy the land unless they would endeavor to improve it, and if they make no corn for their subsistence next year they could not expect any further relief from the Country [colony]. Mon’r [Monsieur] de Joux promised at their next meeting to acquaint them all with what I said, and to endeavor to stir them up to be diligent in weeding and securing their corn and wheat, of which latter there are many small patches, but some is overrun with woods, and the horses (of which they have several, with some Cows) have spoiled more; most of them promise fair. Indeed, they are very poor, and I am not able to supply them with Corn (they being about 250 last month), having bought up all in these two counties, and not having received one month’s provision from all the other Counties, there being some in the Isle of Wight, but cannot hire any to fetch it. There are above 20 families seated for 4 or 5 miles below the Lower Creek and have cleared small plantations, but few of them had broke up their grounds.

We went up to the Coal [River], which is not above a mile and a-half from their settlement on the great upper Creek, which, rising very high in great Rains, hath washed away the Bank that the Coal lies bare, otherwise it’s very deep in the Earth, the land being very high and near the surface is plenty of Slate. Tho’ these people are very poor, yet they seem very cheerful and are (as far as we could learn) very healthy, all they seem to desire is that they might have Bread enough. We lodged there that night and returned the new Road I caused to be marked, which is extraordinary Level and dry way and leads either to the falls or the mill, a very good well beaten path for carts.



W. Byrd

Description of Manakin Town by Franz Louis Michel, 1702³

Michel, a Swiss geologist, was a co-founder of New Bern in [North] Carolina a few years after his visit to Manakin Town on the James River in Virginia.

“a man is put into such a condition . . . that he can be happy and enjoy life”

. . . Conditions here differed in every respect from those of other places [in Virginia]. Things that are grown are there in such abundance that many Englishmen come a distance of 30 miles to get fruit, which they mostly exchange for cattle. Gardens are filled there with all kinds of fruit, especially the garden of the man from Aargau [Aargau: a region of Switzerland]. The cattle are fat because of the abundant pasture. The soil is not sandy, as it is generally in Virginia, but it is a heavy, rich soil. Each person takes [for his property] 50 paces in width, the length extends as far as one cares to make it or is willing to work it. I have already mentioned that the [Manocan] Indians had a town there and how it was destroyed. Since that time trees have not grown very large, so that in a short time and with little effort a large place could be cleared for building purposes. I have seen the most awful wild grapevines, whose thickness and height are incredible. There are several kinds of grapes, the best are as large as a small nut. They make fairly good wine, a beginning has been made to graft them, the prospects are fine. It is much healthier there than towards the ocean. The country is full of game and fish. The Indians often visit there, bringing game, rum and other smaller things. There is a good opportunity to trade with skins. They [the Indians] often bring pottery and when desired fill it with corn. There are more than 60 [French] families there. They all live along the river. . . .

[Michel summarizes the necessary provisions for establishing such a settlement, as he envisions creating for other European Protestant refugees.]

. . . About 400 dollars are necessary in order to set up a man properly, namely to enable him to buy two slaves, with whom in two years a beautiful farm can be cleared, because the trees are far apart. Afterwards the settler must be provided with cattle, a horse, costing at the usual price £4 [4 English pounds] a cow with calf 50 shillings, a mare [?] 10 shillings. Furniture and clothes, together with tools and provisions for a year, must also be on hand. It is indeed possible to begin with less and succeed, but then three or four years pass by before one gets into a good condition. The one who is not used to work in great heat, becomes sick and must suffer much, before he can make progress by his work alone. By the above method a man is put into such a condition the first year, that he can be happy and enjoy life. It is indeed said truthfully that there is no other country where it is possible with so few means and so easily to make an honest living and be in easy circumstances. For two servants can raise a bigger crop than one needs, the cattle increase incredibly fast without trouble; fruit grows in abundance. When a tree or something else is planted one must be surprised to see it grow up so soon and bear fruit. Besides, in the gardens grows whatever one desires. The cows are pasturing round about the house during the whole year. They yield enough butter, cheese and milk. In addition there is no lack of game and fish. Besides it is a quiet land devoted to our religion, and he who wants to enjoy honest exercise finds opportunities enough for it, especially the one who loves field work or hunting. It is, therefore, possible to make an honest life, quietly and contentedly. Much evil is absent there, because there is no opportunity for it.

. . . as the years passed, the frontier moved ever farther west, leaving behind the Manakin area. Farms and plantations replaced the virgin wilderness which had once surrounded the village, and the French, now settled on their own farms, became increasingly indistinguishable from their neighbors, accepting fully the life of Virginia with its civilization and culture based on the land which made it possible. Soon they were intermarrying with their English neighbors, and their sons were growing up to move elsewhere while their daughters often selected English husbands. Fewer and fewer inhabitants continued to live in the village itself until by 1750 or thereabouts it was completely deserted.

[James L. Bugg, Jr., “The French Huguenot Settlement of Manakin Town,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 61:4 (October 1953), p. 394.]

³ William J. Hinke, ed., trans., “Report of the Journey of Francis Louis Michel from Berne, Switzerland, to Virginia, October 2, 1701–December 1, 1702,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 24:1-2 (January/April 1916), pp. 122-124.