

The U.S. Navy's History and Architectural Heritage Program in Hampton Roads

Kiskiack - The Changing Architectural Landscape

Teacher's Lesson Plan

Introduction: The name "Kiskiack" is a Virginian Algonquian word for a village site and small Powhatan tribal group located on the present day Naval Weapons Station at Yorktown, Virginia. Kiskiack is also the name of a very early 18th century brick building located on the Naval Weapons Station at Yorktown. This brick structure, which is the oldest building owned by the U.S. Navy, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The architectural landscape of Virginia changed very quickly from the early 17th century to the beginning of the 18th century. When the English encountered the Powhatan chiefdom in 1607 in Virginia, Native American architecture was based upon permanent villages made up of long-houses or "Yihakans." By the beginning of the 18th century, English settlers had displaced the local Native Americans throughout the entire lower Virginia Tidewater area. The built environment had by then become dominated by New World adaptations of Postmedieval English colonial housing styles.

This changing architectural landscape reflected a major cultural shift away from Native American adaptive strategies based on natural resource utilization. With the introduction of the English, the cultural and architectural landscape changed to become one typified by a built environment dependent upon a more focused industrialized economy.

By comparing and contrasting the changing Native American and English colonial architectural landscape in the 17th into the early 18th century, students can gain a deeper understanding of how cultural changes are reflected through the built environment.

Unit Objectives and Understandings:

- The Native American natural resource based economy supported architectural housing styles built with Native tools and local natural resources.
- When the Europeans arrived in Virginia, they introduced new architectural styles based on an industrialized economy.
- By the beginning of the 18th century, the architectural landscape of Virginia had completely changed. Native Americans and their long-houses had been completely displaced from the lower Tidewater area. English colonists living and working in New World adaptations of Postmedieval type structures completely dominated the architectural and cultural landscape.
- Regional architectural styles can be a prime indication of cultural change when viewed through a historic perspective.

Instructional Objectives:

5.1 The student will describe life in North America before the 17th century by evaluating the impact of

native economies on their shelters and culture.

5.2 The student will evaluate early explorations of the Americas, in terms of the economic and social impact on the American Indians.

5.3 The student will describe colonial America with emphasis on the life in the colonies in the 18th century and the principal economic connections between the colonies and England.

Overview:

The students will be given a brief introduction covering Virginia's Powhatan Indian settlement patterns, village locations and architecture prior to the arrival of the English in 1607. They will also be exposed to the concept that Native American technology and house building activities are part of a systematic strategy to exploit the local environment through renewable natural resources utilization.

The students will then be briefed concerning the English colonial effort in Tidewater, Virginia. The fact that the English displaced the Native Americans and in many cases adapted the same settlement patterns will be stressed. The economic factors, technology and specialized craftsmanship skills required to construct colonial settlements will also be compared and contrasted with Native American methods.

In conclusion, the students will understand in greater depth how as the architectural landscape changed from Native American long-house settlements to English Postmedieval styles, the cultural fabric of southeastern Virginia also underwent great change. By examining the contrasts between competing economic technologies, students will also begin to view our changing built environment as a reflection of cultural change.

Preparing the Lesson:

- Gather historical materials relating to Native American settlement patterns, tools and materials relating to house construction techniques.
- Gather historical materials relating to 17th century English colonial houses, tools, materials and construction methods.
- Gather Web resources such as Jamestown Settlement, Colonial National Park, Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the APVA Jamestown Rediscovery project's Web sites for resource materials and student search vehicles.
- Organize a short presentation explaining the lesson

Conducting the Lesson:

- Begin the lesson by giving a short overview of pre-European contact Virginia, its inhabitants, tools, shelters and environment.
- Introduce the idea that conditions will change with the arrival of the English in 1607. Focus on house construction technology and shelters as an indication of cultural change.
- Assign students to complete a report comparing and contrasting Native American and English Colonial shelters, materials and tools. Also have them discuss why the arrival of the English would have affected the landscape (settlement patterns, types of houses encountered - where Indians and English lived.)
- After the reports are turned in and reviewed, hold a class discussion to reinforce the concept that the built environment is a reflection of cultural change in most societies. Evaluate the effects the English settlement had on Indian populations (they were displaced - moved away from lower Tidewater areas and eventually abandoned long-houses in favor of standard 18th century Colonial houses).

Evaluating the Lesson:

- Evaluate individual participation and answers in the group discussions.
- Evaluate individual turned in reports in terms of materials comprehension, subject matter understanding and topical focus.

Extending the Lesson:

- During the group discussion, summarize by pointing out the change in our present built environment from the student's grandparent's time until now. Discuss housing, tools, and where people live. Reinforce that architecture is a prime indication of how society changes.

Historical Background:

1. Powhatan Indian settlements were located along large streams and rivers.
2. These Native American Villages numbered from 3 or 4 to 100 long-houses.
3. Small family units to extended families as large as 20 people lived in typical long-house.
4. All tools used in Native American shelter construction were made out of natural materials from the local natural environment (stone, bone, wood, plants).
5. House constructing tools included: stone axes, stone adzes, stone knives, digging sticks to dig roots for cordage, hammerstones to pound roots for cordage making, stone or shell cutting tools, wooden stakes and mallets to drive holes in the ground.
6. Construction materials included: 15' long tree saplings, several miles of string and cordage (the entire structure is tied together), mats made from local reeds for wall coverings, tree bark for wall covering, and in some cases animal skins for interior walls.
7. English settlements in the lower Tidewater Peninsula displaced the Native American villages. The former Indian sites proved to be excellent homesteads for the new English colonists. By 1644, a palisade fence wall standing from the James River to the York River near present day Williamsburg, had completely cut off Native American access to the areas around the former Indian village at Kiskiack.
8. English house construction depended upon an entirely different set of tools and materials than Native American housing.
9. The tools used to make English shelters were for the most part metal. Metal requires an industrial base and capacity for manufacture. Blacksmiths, machinists, millwrights and many other crafts existed to make the tools needed to build English houses.
10. Tools needed for European type construction included: hammers, hand drills, drill bits, saws, planes of all types, axes, adzes, chisels, mallets, shovels, picks and measuring devices.
11. Materials included: Hewed timbers, bricks, plaster, sawn boards of several different grades, split shingles or ceramic material for roofing tiles.
12. Manufactured or produced materials for English houses included: Doors, hinges, nails, spike nails, window hardware, window frames, roofing materials, door and other hardware.
13. After the 1644 War with the Powhatan in Virginia, no Native Americans were admitted into the

colonial areas near Kiskiack.

14. By 1700, what was left of the Powhatan tribes lived on small reservations in what is now King William County and Charles City County, Virginia. By 1800, although the Powhatans had and would keep their cultural identity as Native Americans, their dialect of Powhatan Algonquian had become an extinct language. The Native Americans living in Tidewater Virginia in the beginning of the 19th century also dressed like all other Americans in this area, lived in similar houses and basically did the same types of things for a living as all other Virginians.

15. By the beginning of the 18th century, Native American architecture had completely given way to the typical New World interpretations of English Postmedieval Gentry housing in Tidewater, Virginia.



The Kiskiack House, listed on the National Registry of Historic Places since 1969.



Powhatan Indian Village, based on archaeological and historical documentation at Jamestown, Virginia.