

## **Some Virginia Shipwrights and Orphan Boys**

During the early years, vessels of three hundred tons and over were being built in Virginia.

It is evident that many of the shipwrights who transported to Virginia from England found that the life of a planter was more desirable than that of a shipbuilder.

However, there were some immigrants who built ships on their plantations. Adam Dixon, who resided at Pashbehays near Jamestown in 1624, came over in the "Margaret and John", was sent by the Company as a master calker of ships and boats. On March 31, 1626 when Thomas Munn appeared before the Council and the General Court of Virginia and swore that he was directed by Captain Barwick to make a small shallop and that afterwards this boat was sold to Captain William Eppes for two hundred pounds of tobacco. Further that upon the death of Captain Barwick, Munn had delivered to George Sandys, Treasurer, a list of debts owing, and this debt had never been paid. As the years went by, a number of shipwrights came to the colony and were engaged in private shipyards on plantations, or they set up shipyards of their own.

Orphan boys were sometimes apprenticed to these shipbuilders until they reached the age of twenty-one wherein they were expected to be taught to read, write and cipher in addition to learning the trade of ship-carpenter.

Many of the shipwrights who came to Virginia during the seventeenth century, became land owners, some of them owning large tracts of land, as shown by county records, especially in the Tidewater area. In Lancaster on the Rappahannock River, John Meredith, a shipwright, obtained, by patent, a

tract of fifty acres.

His sale of 600 acres is recorded, also a contract to build a sloop and a small boat, in payment of a debt of 47,300 pounds of tobacco.

In Rappahannock County records, we find shipwright Simon Miller, a noted shipbuilder, who owned a tract of 125 acres; and John Griffin, a shipwright, who, in 1684, recorded a deed to Colonel Cadwalader Jones for a bark of fifty odd tons, for the consideration of fifty pounds sterling. Source: Shipping In Colonial Virginia by Cerinda W. Evans.