

17th Century Sudden Remarriages



17th century marriages

The loss of a spouse prompted a re-marriage. Instances of persons having been married three times was not unusual. Because there were few women in the colony. The first James Town colony consisted mostly of men. After the massacre of 1622/3 certain settlers returned to London for wives. The Virginia Company also sent at least one shipload of women to be married.

One might conclude that a hasty marriage after the death of a spouse is horrible, yet, as soon as the funeral celebration commenced, prospective suitors needing wives plotted their courtship. Gifts were made to the daughters in the form of land. The widow of an established plantation was desirable as the new husband took responsibility (and title) of the land. It was customary for him to insert in the deed conveying the gift, a clause providing for what should be done with the gift in the event she should become a wife before she reached her sixteenth year. Women who had not yet passed their twelfth year were considered immature. Most women were married at such an immature age that they became broken in health,

and after bearing from ten to twelve children, died, leaving their husbands to marry again and surround himself with a second brood.

Often, a very young wife was left widowed for several years, and if endowed with beauty, charm or a fine plantation, she soon consoled herself by marrying a second or third time.

So great was the haste in some instances that the second husband was granted the probate of the will of the first. In 1696, Rev. James Boulware of Essex County obtained a judgment against Edward Danneline for fees which were due him, not only for having performed the marriage service of Mr. and Mrs. Danneline, but also for having preached the funeral sermon of John Smith, the first husband of Mrs. Danneline. Source: Essex County Records, Orders, 11 June 1696.