

**AMERICAN JOURNEYS COLLECTION**



Letter of  
John Rolfe,  
1614

DOCUMENT NO. AJ-079



WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
DIGITAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES



|| [www.americanjourneys.org](http://www.americanjourneys.org) || [www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org) ||  
© Wisconsin Historical Society 2003

Letter of  
John Rolfe,  
1614

**C O N T E N T S**

Introduction .....	237
His Reasons for marrying Pocahontas .....	239

AMERICAN JOURNEYS COLLECTION

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
DIGITAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

## INTRODUCTION

JOHN ROLFE, the author of this letter, came of an ancient family of Heacham, in the county of Norfolk, England, and was the son of John Rolfe and Dorothea Mason. He was baptized in the church at Heacham, May 6, 1585. In 1609 he went to Bermuda in the Third Supply with Sir Thomas Gates. While there, a wife, to whom he had been married in England, bore him a daughter, who was christened Bermuda, but soon died. The parents reached Virginia in May, 1610, where the mother died. Rolfe was the first Englishman to introduce the cultivation of tobacco in Virginia (1612). Not long after, Pocahontas was captured by Samuel Argall and brought to Jamestown. Rolfe fell in love with her and married her about April 5, 1614. Two months later he was made recorder of the colony; he remained in this office till 1619. He and his Indian bride went with Sir Thomas Dale, in 1616, to England, where Pocahontas was introduced at court by Lady Delaware and her portrait was engraved by Simon de Passe. While in England, he sent a description of Virginia to King James and to Sir Robert Rich. In the spring of 1617 he and Pocahontas made ready to return, with Samuel Argall as deputy-governor, when Pocahontas sickened and died at Gravesend, March 21, 1617. After his return Rolfe married Jane, daughter of Captain William Peirce, and had a grant of land in Mulberry Island. It was singular that this son-in-law of Powhatan should meet his death at the hands of the savages in the massacre of 1622. He left behind by Pocahontas one son,

Thomas Rolfe, who came to Virginia, where his descendants are still represented. This letter to Sir Thomas Dale, the deputy-governor, was published by Ralph Hamor in his tract entitled *A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia and the Successes of the Affaires there till the 18 of June, 1614* (London, 1615), pp. 61-68.

L. G. T.

## LETTER OF JOHN ROLFE, 1614

*The coppie of the Gentle-mans letters to Sir Thomas Dale, that after married Powhatans daughter, containing the reasons moving him thereunto.*

*Honourable Sir, and most worthy Governor:*

WHEN your leasure shall best serve you to peruse these lines, I trust in God, the beginning will not strike you into a greater admiration,<sup>1</sup> then the end will give you good content. It is a matter of no small moment, concerning my own particular, which here I impart unto you, and which toucheth mee so neerely, as the tendernesse of my salvation. Howbeit I freely subject my selfe to your grave and mature judgement, deliberation, approbation and determination; assuring my selfe of your zealous admonitions, and godly comforts, either perswading me to desist, or encouraging me to persist therein, with a religious feare and godly care, for which (from the very instant, that this began to roote it selfe within the secret bosome of my brest) my daily and earnest praiers have bin, still are, and ever shall be produced forth with as sincere a godly zeale as I possibly may to be directed, aided and governed in all my thoughts, words and deedes, to the glory of God, and for my eternal consolation. To persevere wherein I never had more neede, nor (till now) could ever imagine to have bin moved with the like occasion.

But (my case standing as it doth) what better worldly refuge can I here seeke, then [than] to shelter my selfe under the safety of your favourable protection? And did not my ease proceede from an unspotted conscience, I should not dare to offer to your view and approved judgement, these passions of

<sup>1</sup> Surprise, or wonder.

my troubled soule, so full of feare and trembling is hypocrisie and dissimulation. But knowing my owne innocency and godly fervor, in the whole prosecution hereof, I doubt not of your benigne acceptance, and clement construction. As for malicious depravers, and turbulent spirits, to whom nothing is tastful, but what pleaseth their unsavory pallat, I passe not for them being well assured in my perswasion (by the often triall and proving of my selfe, in my holiest meditations and prayers) that I am called hereunto by the spirit of God; and it shall be sufficient for me to be protected by your selfe in all vertuous and pious indevours. And for my more happie proceeding herein, my daily oblations<sup>1</sup> shall ever be addressed to bring to passe so good effects, that your selfe, and all the world may truely say: This is the worke of God, and it is marvelous in our eies.

But to avoid tedious preambles, and to come neerer the matter: first suffer me with your patence, to sweepe and make cleane the way wherein I walke, from all suspicions and doubts, which may be covered therein, and faithfully to reveale unto you, what should move me hereunto.

Let therefore this my well advised protestation, which here I make betweene God and my own conscience, be a sufficient witnesse, at the dreadfull day of judgement (when the secret of all mens harts shall be opened) to condemne me herein, if my chieftest intent and purpose be not, to strive with all my power of body and minde, in the undertaking of so mightie a matter, no way led (so farre forth as mans weakenesse may permit) with the unbridled desire of carnall affection: but for the good of this plantation, for the honour of our countrie, for the glory of God, for my owne salvation, and for the converting to the true knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, an unbeleiving creature, namely Pokahuntas. To whom my hartie and best thoughts are, and have a long time bin so intangled, and intrahled in so intricate a laborinth, that I was even awearied to unwind my selfe thereout. But almighty God, who never

<sup>1</sup> Prayers.

faileth his, that truly invoke his holy name hath opened the gate, and led me by the hand that I might plainly see and discern the safe paths wherein to treade.

To you therefore (most noble Sir) the patron and Father of us in this countrey doe I utter the effects of this my settled and long continued affection (which hath made a mightie warre in my meditations) and here I doe truly relate, to what issue this dangerous combate is come unto, wherein I have not onely examined, but throughly tried and pared my thoughts even to the quicke, before I could finde any fit wholesome and apt applications to cure so daungerous an ulcer. I never failed to offer my daily and faithfull praiers to God, for his sacred and holy assistance. I forgot not to set before mine eies the frailty of mankinde, his prones<sup>1</sup> to evill, his indulgencie of wicked thoughts, with many other imperfections wherein man is daily insnared, and oftentimes overthrowne, and them compared to my present estate. Nor was I ignorant of the heavie displeasure which almightie God conceived against the sonnes of Levie and Israel for marrying strange wives, nor of the inconveniences which may thereby arise, with other the like good motions which made me looke about warily and with good circumspection, into the grounds and principall agitations, which thus should provoke me to be in love with one whose education hath bin rude, her manners barbarous, her generation accursed, and so discrepant in all nurriture from my selfe, that oftentimes with feare and trembling, I have ended my private controversie with this: surely these are wicked instigations, hatched by him who seeketh and delighteth in mans destruction; and so with fervent praiers to be ever preserved from such diabolical assaults (as I tooke those to be) I have taken some rest.

Thus when I had thought I had obtained my peace and quietnesse, beholde another, but more gracious tentation hath made breaches into my holiest and strongest meditations; with which I have bin put to a new triall, in a straighter manner

<sup>1</sup> Proneness.

then the former: for besides the many passions and sufferings which I have daily, houely, yea and in my sleepe indured, even awaking mee to astonishment, taxing mee with remisnesse, and carelesnesse, refusing and neglecting to performe the duetie of a good Christian, pulling me by the eare, and crying: why dost not thou indeavour to make her a Christian? And these have happened to my greater wonder, even when she hath bin furthest seperated from me, which in common reason (were it not an undoubted worke of God) might breede forgetfulnesse of a farre more worthie creature. Besides, I say the holy spirit of God hath often demaunded of me, why I was created? If not for transitory pleasures and worldly vanities, but to labour in the Lords vineyard, there to sow and plant, to nourish and increase the fruites thereof, daily adding with the good husband in the Gospell, somewhat to the tallent, that in the end the fruites may be reaped, to the comfort of the laborer in this life, and his salvation in the world to come? And if this be, as undoubtedly this is, the service Jesus Christ requireth of his best servant: wo unto him that hath these instruments of pietie put into his hands, and wilfully despiseth to worke with them. Likewise, adding hereunto her great apparance of love to me, her desire to be taught and instructed in the knowledge of God, her capablenesse of understanding, her aptnesse and willingnesse to receive anie good impression, and also the spirituall, besides her owne incitements stirring me up hereunto.

What should I doe? shall I be of so untoward a disposition, as to refuse to leade the blind into the right way? Shall I be so unnaturall, as not to give bread to the hungrie? or uncharitable, as not to cover the naked? Shall I despise to actuate these pious dueties of a Christian? Shall the base feare of displeasing the world, overpower and with holde mee from revealing unto man these spirituall workes of the Lord, which in my meditations and praiers, I have daily made knowne unto him? God forbid. I assuredly trust hee hath thus delt with me for my eternall felicitie, and for his glorie: and I hope so to be guided by his heavenly graice, that in the end by my



faithfull paines, and christianlike labour, I shall attaine to that blessed promise, Pronounced by that holy Prophet Daniell unto the righteous that bring many unto the knowledge of God. Namely, that they shall shine like the starres forever and ever. A sweeter comfort cannot be to a true Christian, nor a greater incouragement for him to labour all the daies of his life, in the performance thereof, nor a greater gaine of consolation, to be desired at the hower of death, and in the day of judgement.

Againe by my reading, and conference with honest and religious persons, have I received no small encouragement, besides *serena mea conscientia*, the cleerenesse of my conscience, clean from the filth of impurity, *quæ est instar muri ahenei*, which is unto me, as a brasen wall. If I should set down at large, the perturbations and godly motions, which have striven within mee, I should but make a tedious and unnecessary volume. But I doubt not these shall be sufficient both to certifie you of my tru intents, in discharging of my dutie to God, and to your selfe, to whose gracious providence I humbly submit my selfe, for his glory, your honour, our Countreys good, the benefit of this Plantation, and for the converting of one unregenerate, to regeneration; which I beseech God to graunt, for his deere Sonne Christ Jesus his sake.

Now if the vulgar sort, who square <sup>1</sup> all mens actions by the base rule of their own filthinesse, shall taxe or taunt me in this my godly labour: let them know, it is not any hungry appetite, to gorge my selfe with incontinency; sure (if I would, and were so sensually inclined) I might satisfie such desire, though not without a seared conscience, yet with Christians more pleasing to the eie, and lesse fearefull in the offence unlawfully committed. Nor am I in so desperate an estate, that I regard not what becommeth of mee; nor am I out of hope but one day to see my Country, nor so void of friends, nor mean in birth, but there to obtain a mach <sup>2</sup> to my great content: nor have I ignorantly passed over my hopes there, or regardlesly

<sup>1</sup> Measure.

<sup>2</sup> Match.

seek to loose the love of my friends, by taking this course: I know them all, and have not rashly overslipped any.

But shal it please God thus to dispose of me (which I earnestly desire to fulfill my ends before sette down) I will heartely accept of it as a godly taxe appointed me, and I will never cease, (God assisting me) untill I have accomplished, and brought to perfection so holy a worke, in which I will daily pray God to blesse me, to mine, and her eternall happines. And thus desiring no longer to live, to enjoy the blessings of God, then [than] this my resolution doth tend to such godly ends, as are by me before declared: not doubting of your favourable acceptance, I take my leave, beseeching Almighty God to raine downe upon you, such plenitude of his heavenly graces, as your heart can wish and desire, and so I rest,

At your commaund most willing

to be disposed off

JOHN ROLFE.