



Virginia. Discoverd and Discrib'd by Captain John Smith . . . 1606  
(London 1612-25 edition)

**Cartographer:** John Smith

**Date:** 1612-25

**Size:** 14 x 11 inches

**Description:** In *The Generall Historie of Virginie, New England, and the Summer Isles*: 'With the names of the Adventurers, Planters, and Governours from their first Beginning An. 1584 to this present 1624. With the Proceedings of Those Several Colonies and the Accidents that befell them in all their Journyes and Discoveries. Also the Maps and Descriptions of all those Countreyes, their Commodities, People, Government, Customes, and Religion, yet knowne. Divided into sixe Bookes. By Captaine John Smith sometymes Governour in those Countreyes & Admirall of New England. London. Printed by I. D. and I. H. for Michael Sparkes. 1624.)

This famous map was first published in *A Map of Virginia. With a Description of the countrey, the Commodities, People, Government and Religion*. Written by Captaine Smith, sometimes Governour of the Countrey, etc. At Oxford, Printed by Joseph Barnes. 1612. This small quarto volume was printed on the hand press that the Earl of Leicester gave to Oxford in 1585. Joseph Barnes was the first University printer. This so-called "Oxford Tract" consisted of two parts, one a topographical description of Virginia, written by John Smith "with his owne hand" and "penned in the Land it treateth of," and the other, a history of the settlement of Virginia, written by the companions of Smith. The tract was republished in Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginie, New England, and the Summer Isles* in 1624 and in *Purchas his Pilgrimes* (IV, pp. 1691 to 1733) in 1625.

A number of additions and modifications were made on the engraved plate during the next 20 years for successive printings of the map. Based on these variations, scholars recognize 10 different issues or states of the Smith map. Most scholars agree that Smith probably did not actually draw the map, as there is no evidence that he had skill as a draftsman. However, he undoubtedly provided the draftsman with all essential data and information based on his surveys and travels and his conversations with the natives. While the map was in preparation, Smith probably personally directed and instructed the draftsman, who some believe was Nathaniel Powell.

At first glance Smith's map bears little resemblance to one of present-day Virginia. This is partly because it is oriented with north to the right rather than at the top of the sheet. If the map is turned 90 degrees to the left, however, some of the familiar landmarks of tidewater Virginia can readily be recognized. Extending almost across the width of the sheet is *Chesapeack Bay*. Feeding into it from the west are the rivers *Powhatan* (James), *Chickahomania*, *Patawomeck* (Potomac), *Patuxent*, and *Sasquahanough* (Susquehanna). At the mouth of the bay Cape Henry and Cape Charles may be located. *Poynte Comfort* at the entrance to the Powhatan is today known as Old Point Comfort. Some other names which can be identified on modern maps include *Smyths Iles* (Smith Island), *Stingra Ile* (Stingray Point), *Nandsamund* (Nansemond River), *Appamatuck* (Appomattox), *Potopaco* (Port Tobacco), and, of course, *Jamestowne*.

Many of the names (of which there are about 200) on Smith's map locate Indian villages and settlements, with the result that this is one of the best sources for Indian names and localities for pre-English Virginia. Names such as *Gosnolds Baye*, *Sharpes Ile*, *Fetherstones Baye*, *Wiffins Poynte*, and *Russells Ile* honor members of Smith's survey parties or leaders of the Jamestown Colony. The origin of some English names is uncertain, as they are not noted in any of Smith's writings.

Smith's map includes the coastal region between the North Carolina-Virginia border and the head of Chesapeake Bay. The Atlantic side of the Delmarva Peninsula (at the bottom of the map) is not clearly delimited. Inland the map extends for approximately 150 miles to include headwaters of the coastal plain streams. The western reaches, however, are vague and based largely on information Smith received from the Indians. In the tract published with the map Smith notes: "in which mappe observe this, that as far as you see the little Crosses on rivers, mountains, or other places, have been discovered, the rest was had by information from the Savages, and are set downe according to their instructions."

When we consider the difficulties under which the surveys were made, the relatively brief periods the parties were in the field, and the almost complete lack of scientific instruments, the accuracy of Smith's map is truly amazing. For example, it shows Cape Henry, located on modern charts at latitude 36 ° 56', as 37 ° 02'. Determining correct longitude was especially difficult in Smith's day, for the chronometer did not come into use for another hundred years. Even so the longitude error for Cape Henry is less than eight minutes. Longitude (marked on the right and left borders) is reckoned east of Ferro in the Canary Islands. Cape Henry is thus shown at about 309°30' east longitude.

Characteristic of 17<sup>th</sup> century cartography, the Smith map is adorned with illustrations, sketches, scrolls, and ornamental lettering. In the upper left corner is pictured the interior of Powhatan's lodge, where the Indian Chief "held this state and fashion when Capt. Smith was delivered to him prisoner." The portrait at the upper right is of the most impressive of the Sasquesahanocks, whom Smith described as "great

and well proportioned men . . . for they seem like Giants to the English . . . yet seemed of an honest and simple disposition. . . . The picture of the greatest of them is signified in the Mappe. The Calfe of whose leg was 3 quarters of a yard about, and all the rest of his limbs so answerable to that proportion, that he seemed the goodliest man that ever we beheld."

The royal coat of arms decorates the top central part of the map, immediately below the title scroll. Near the lower right corner is Captain Smith's own coat of arms, which was granted him by the Duke of Transylvania. The three heads on the shield are of Turks "which with his sword before the town of Regall, he did overcome, kill, and cut off, in the Province of Transylvania in 1602." The scroll below the shield carries the Latin motto *Vincere est Vivere* [to conquer is to live]. Smith's coat of arms is not found on the first or second states of the map, and the third includes the arms without the motto. The fourth and subsequent states include both arms and motto.

The sea monster and sailing vessel in "The Virginia Sea" are typical of early 17<sup>th</sup> century map ornamentation. The ship is not identified as one of the three which carried the first settlers to Jamestown, but it undoubtedly resembles them. The scale, in leagues, is given in the decorative cartouche in the lower center of the map. Note that the fleur-de-lis on the 32 point compass rose points to the right, which is north on the Smith map. Below the scale is the inscription "Discovered and Described by Captayn John Smith 1606." The significance of the date, which does not appear on the first state of the map, has never been satisfactorily explained. As noted above, Smith's draft map was sent to England in November 1608 and the printed map was first issued in 1612.

Although several earlier maps of Virginia had been published, Smith's map has been described by Ford as "the most authoritative survey of the country yet furnished and had no real predecessor." It continued to be so regarded for a number of years and was reproduced in many of the magnificent atlases (for example, those of Blaeu, Mercator, and Jansson) published in the Netherlands during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Smith's Virginia "greatly influenced every map of the area made after its publication," according to Verner, "and the names of the places given on it have in many instances survived to the present."

John Smith never returned to Virginia after 1609, but in 1614 he spent about five months exploring and mapping the coast of New England. The results of this expedition he incorporated in a book, *A Description of New-England*, which described the natural resources of the lands between Cape Cod and the Penobscot River in Maine. Published in 1616, the tract included an outline map of the coast and islands between these two points. This map became the standard chart of the northern coast of English America. It helped attract the Pilgrims to that area and was instrumental in guiding them to *Plimouth*, which first appears on Smith's chart. The style, ornamentation, and lettering are similar on the Virginia and New England maps.

The two maps of colonial America with which Captain John Smith's name is indelibly linked are irrefutable evidence of his contributions in exploration, observation, and cartographic recording. The map of Virginia, in particular, is unique in portraying for us the geographical landscape of pre-English America.

The map seems to have been made in response to the instructions issued in 1606 by the London council: *You must observe, if you can, whether the river on which you plant doth spring out of mountains or out of lakes. If it be out of any lake, the passage to the other sea will be more easy, and is like enough, that out of the same lake you shall find some spring which runs the contrary way towards the East India Sea.* Captain Newport was particularly



instructed to spend two months in the exploration of the ports and rivers, for the "council in England were ever solicitous and intent on the discovery of the South Sea."

The persistence of this belief in the proximity of the Atlantic coast to the South Sea, or Pacific Ocean, is a curious feature of early colonial geography. It was responsible for the sea-to-sea grants in the colonial charters and for many explorations into the interior. In 1607, Popham wrote to James I from Sagadahoc on the coast of Maine: "They positively assure me that there is a sea in the opposite or Western part of this Province distant not more than seven days' journey from our Fort of St. George, in Sagadahoc, a sea large, wide and deep, the boundaries of which they are wholly ignorant of. This cannot be any other than the Southern Ocean, reaching to the region of China, which unquestionably cannot be far from these regions." As late as 1651 the *Domina Virginia* Farrer map (#472) has this legend on the Pacific coast:

*Sir Francis Drake was on this sea and landed Ano 1577 in 37 · deg. where hee tooke Possession in the name of Q: Eliza: Calling it new Albion. Whose happy shoers, (in ten dayes march with 50. foote and 30 horsemen from the head of Jeames River over those hills and through the rich adjacent Vallyes beautified with as proffitable rivers, which necessarily must run into yt peacefull Indian sea,) may be discovered to the exceeding benefit of Great Brittain, and joye of all true English.*

One week after landing at Jamestown, Newport set out with a party of twenty-four, including Captain John Smith, "to finde the head of this Ryver, the Laake mentyoned by others heretofore, the Sea againe, the Mountaynes Apalatsi, or some issue." The party spent the first night at Weanock, opposite the mouth of the Appamatuck River. At Arrchatek, a little above the present Farrar's Island, they met an Indian chief, whom they wrongly supposed to be the great Powhatan of the country, "the Cheife of all the kyngdomes," and were entertained by him at Powhatan, "the habitat yon of the great kyng Pawatah" near the falls of the river, the present site of Richmond. Here they heard of the hostile Monacans of the back country, supposed by some to be the ancestors of the Tuscaroras, and decided to return. "So our Captayne made all haste home" and arrived at Jamestown, May 27.



The following November, Smith set out to search the surrounding country for food for the starving settlers. At *Kecoughtan* (Hampton) he forced the Indians to load his boat with corn and returned to Jamestown. In December, while on an expedition up the Chickahomany to trade for corn, he was captured by the Indians on the upper waters of the Chickahominy River near where the Battle of Fair Oaks was fought in 1862. He was

taken first to Orapaks, some twelve miles from the Falls near Richmond, and later carried north as far as the Potomac River. At length, he was brought before Powhatan, "their Emperor," at Werowocomoco, his principal and favorite residence, on the north side of the York River, at a place now called *Powhatan's Chimney*. An old stone chimney still standing there is believed to be the one built by the colonists for Powhatan. Here, according to Smith, his life was saved by "the King's dearest daughter," Pocahontas, and he was sent back to Jamestown, where he arrived on January 8, 1608 (1607 O. S., as in legend on map).

The following June, Smith with a party of fourteen, in an open barge, started from Jamestown to explore Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River in the hope of finding the long-sought-for passage to the South Sea. This survey occupied him three months. He went down the James River, passed *Smith's Isles* and *Russell Isles*, the latter named for a member of the party, Walter Russell, "Doctor of Physicke," and explored the eastern side of the Bay until he reached *Limbo Isles*, when he crossed to the west shore and continued north to the Potomac River, which he went up for thirty miles, passing *Potapaco*, now called Port Tobacco. *Stingra Ile*, the modern Stingray Point, at the mouth of the *Toppahanock* [Rappahannock] River, commemorates a serious injury to Smith's hand from a fish called *Stingeray*. He went up the *Toppahanock* to the present site of Fredericksburg. On later issues of the map, *Fetherstones Bay*, near the falls of the river, commemorates the death of one of the party, Richard Fetherstone.



Going north again from Jamestown, the party passed the mouth of the *Pawtuxunt* River, described as "of a lesse proportion than the rest"; the *Bolus*, the modern Patapsco, and *Willoubyes flu*, named after Smith's birthplace in England. They entered the *Sasquesahanock flu* as far as *Smyths fales* and at *Tockwogh* were visited by the "giant-like" natives. Disappointed in the hope of discovering an entrance to the sea, which he still believed lay just beyond the mountains, Smith returned to Jamestown in September in time to compose the draft of a map which he sent by Newport to the London Council in November, 1608. In the letter which accompanied the map, Smith wrote: "I have sent you this Mappe of the Bay and Rivers, with an annexed Relation of the Countries and Nations that inhabit them, as you may see at large." The "Annexed Relation," was the pamphlet called *Map of Virginia*, published at Oxford in 1612.

Smith seems to have sent a duplicate of this early *Mappe of the Bay and Rivers* to Henry Hudson, who carried it with him to Holland in 1609. It was to this map he probably referred, when he said that he possessed some letters and charts in regard to the Northwest Passage, which "Captain Smith had sent him from Virginia." No copy of

this map is now known. It was probably the original draft of the map published at Oxford in 1612.

Smith continued to explore the surrounding country. He sent into the country of the *Chawons* and *Mangoags* south of the James to search for traces of Raleigh's lost colony. He himself set out, December 29, 1608, with a party to explore the *Pamanuk* [York] River. The party spent "6 or 7 daies" at Christmas time at *Kecoughton* [Hampton], where they had "plentie of good oysters, fish, flesh, wild foule and bread," and again stopped at *Kiskiack* [*Chescake*, between Williamsburg and York] for "3 or 4 daies." At *Werowocomoco*, Smith had an interview with Powhatan and forced him to give him corn for the famished settlers at Jamestown. The map of 1612 reflects the result of these various explorations by Smith.

Justin Winsor states that from the results of these discoveries Smith composed his map of Virginia, a work so singularly exact that it has formed the basis of all like delineations since, and was adduced as authority as late as 1873 towards the settlement of the boundary dispute between the States of Virginia and Maryland.

In the first part of the *Oxford Tract* on page ten, Smith thus refers to his map: "Their severall habitations are more plainly described by this annexed Mappe, which will present to the eie, the way of the mountaines and current of the rivers, with their severall turnings, bays, shoules, Isles, Inlets, and creekes, the breadth of the waters, the distances of places and such like. In which Mappe observe this, that as far as you see the little Crosses on rivers, mountaines, or other places, have beene discovered; the rest was had by information of the Savages, and are set downe according to their instructions. "

Other curious places of interest are: *Quiyoughcohanock*, ten miles from Jamestown, where according to Smith there was a yearly sacrifice of children; *Vittamussack*, the site of "their principall Temple or place of superstition"; *Ceader Ile*, "where we lived 10 weekes upon oisters"; and *Poynt Comfort*, so named because, after landing first at Cape Henry, it put the settlers in "Good Comfort" to find a fair landing place on the opposite shore. "In my discovery of Virginia," wrote Smith, "I presumed to call two nameless headlands after my sovereignes heires, Cape Henry and Cape Charles." Both *Cape Henneri* and *Poynt Comfort* are on the map of Robert Tyndall of 1608. *Jamestowne*, on the *Powhatan*, thirty-eight miles from the sea, is almost an island on Smith's map as on that of Robert Tyndall of 1608 and on the Simancas map of 1610. Today, it is an island.

Whether Smith believed or not in the proximity to Virginia of the waters of the *Great Western Sea*, does not appear on his map, but in the *Oxford Tract* he wrote: "Beyond the mountaines ... [is] a great salt water, which by all likelyhood is either some part of Commada [Canada], some great lake, or some inlet of some sea that falleth into the South sea"; and in his *True Relation of 1608* is the statement: "Within 4 or 5 daies Journey of the Falls was a great turning of salt water."





Frankfurt 1627 edition

An example of John Smith's seminal map of Virginia, which appears in part 13 of Theodore de Bry's *Grand Voyages, Dreyzehender Theil Americae*, published posthumously by De Bry's son-in-law, Matheus Merian.

Smith's map was by far the most important map of Virginia published in the first part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. First issued in 1612, it became the prototype map of the region until Augustine Hermann's map of 1673. Smith's map was first issued separately in London. Later, it was used to illustrate a number of rare works on Virginia and was instrumental in creating interest in the new Virginia Colony. The map records 166 Indian Villages and is to this day source material for Native American archaeologists.

In 1606, the London Company sent its first ship to Virginia and established the Jamestown settlement. As mentioned above, among the passengers was Captain John Smith, who would explore the region and create this map, which upon his return to London he had engraved by William Hole in 1612. The map depicts a number of explorations and observations of Smith and the Jamestown settlers. There is some question as to whether the map is the work of Smith, who led most of the explorations, or the surveyor accompanying him, Nathaniel Powell. However, convention attributes the map to John Smith as his name appears on it in two publications by him and in a third by Samuel Purchas who accredits Smith.

Upon Smith's return to England in 1609, Smith employed William Hole to engrave a map, which was first included in a small pamphlet by Joseph Barnes of Oxford in 1612. The map would not appear again for 12 years, when it was included, along with Smith's map of New England, in his landmark work, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, in 1624. The following year it was included in *Purchas His Pilgrimes*.

The Merian/De Bry edition of Smith's *Virginia* is drawn from the sixth English state of Smith's map. The first six editions of Smith's map are all very rare, pre-dating the appearance of the Smith map in Samuel Purchas' *Hakluytus Posthumus* or *Purchas his Pilgrimes; Containing a History of the World, in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells, by Englishmen and Others* in 1625 – the first time Smith's map appeared in a work which achieved a more wide spread distribution. The Merian 1627 edition of the Smith map is also quite scarce, as parts 13 and 14 of De Bry's *Grand Voyages* are rare and often lack maps. A later version of Merian's edition of the Smith map appears in 1634 when the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> parts of De Bry were consolidated into a single part and translated into Latin.



The Merian edition 3 of Smith's *Virginia* has very minor alternations to the decorative embellishments of the sixth state: The ship in the lower left and decoration surrounding the scale have been removed. It includes images of an Indian figure and Powhatan's lodge based on John White's drawings made during the first attempt to form a colony in Virginia. White's images also appear in part 1 of De Bry's *Grand Voyages*. The annotations are in German.

John Smith's famous 1612 map is simply titled *Virginia* and has north at the right. There is an inset of Powhatan in the upper left corner and the Indian is standing in Pennsylvania. Chesapeake Bay lies at the center of the map and the *Safquefabanough flu* [Susquehanna River] is shown emptying into it. A village of the same name is shown above *Smyths fales* and the right side of the map has a large figure of an Indian

given the name. This figure is based on the Indian chief who came down the river to meet with Smith. Underneath is written *The Safquefabanoughs are a Giant like people thus atyred*. The illustrations of Powhatan's Council and a Sasquesahanough Indian are derived from the original drawings of John White. The locations of several villages are shown with little huts in what would be Pennsylvania. This map would be imitated with increasing detail for the next 75 years. Smith also made a map of New England, but the Pennsylvania region is not shown.

The limits of Smith's explorations are marked with a Maltese cross. Beyond the crosses, Smith relied on Native American accounts to delineate territories further upriver. Smith notes on the map *To the crosses hath bin discoverd what beyond is by relation*. He also depicted hunting parties with bows and arrows hunting forest deer. One of the most intriguing features on Smith's map is the location of American Indian settlements



shown with the names of the nations and tribes. This is most likely the first written recording of indigenous languages in the American colonies. The spatial distribution of mid-Atlantic Indians is also shown in the location points and depictions of the dwellings of the Indian chiefs and the “ordinary houses.”

### References:

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Ristow, Walter W., “Captain John Smith’s Map of Virginia”, *A la Carte, Selected Papers on Maps and Atlases*, 1972, pp. 91-95.

Verner, Coolie, “The First Maps of Virginia, 1590-1673,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 58:3-15 Jan. 1950.

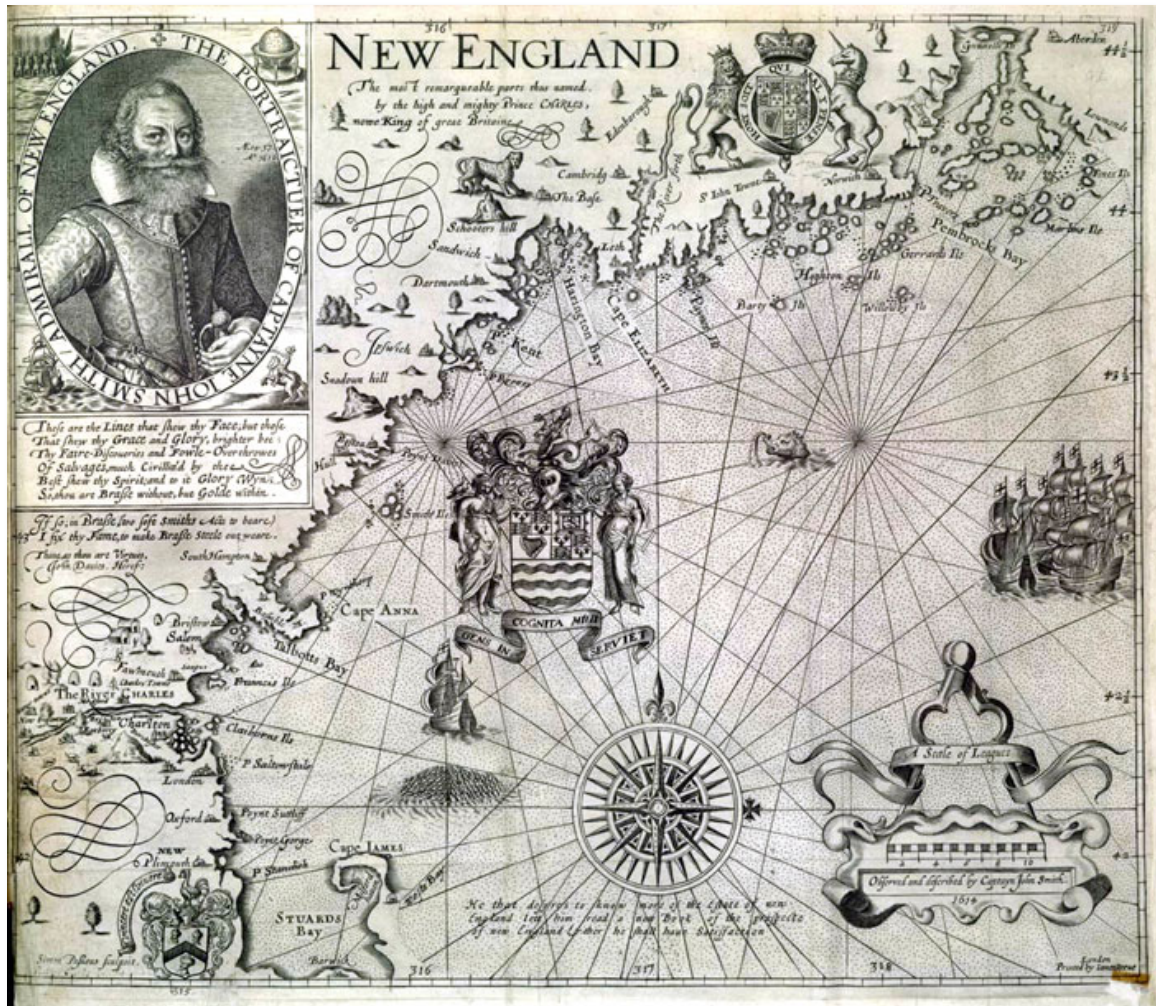


1628 German edition



1627 Frankfurt edition





John Smith's map of New England from  
*The General Historie of Virginia, New-England and the Summer Isles*  
 11 7/8" x 13 7/8"

In 1614, five years after returning to England from Virginia, Captain John Smith returned to the New World, this time to the coasts of Maine and Massachusetts Bay - the region that would come to be known, thanks to the map that he subsequently published, as *New England*.

This map, the result of Smith's personal explorations and field surveys, covers the area from Penobscot Bay to Cape Cod. It is the earliest map devoted to the region and the foundational work of New England cartography. Smith's second New World voyage was initiated by the invitation of four London merchants who financed two ships that sailed in March 1614 with instructions to return with a profitable cargo. Smith made the Atlantic crossing in a relatively speedy six weeks, arriving off Monhegan Island near the Kennebec estuary. By that time the waters of New England, particularly Maine, were being visited by dozens of English and French fishing vessels a year. While the crew of one of Smith's vessels concentrated on catching fish and collecting other valuable commodities, Smith continued down the coast to chart and explore, lamenting the poor quality of existing maps: "[I] had six or seven several plots of those Northern parts, so unlike each to other, and most so differing from any true proportion, or



resemblance of the Country, as they did me no more good, than so much waste paper, though they cost me more."

In the course of his explorations, he named *Plymouth Rock*, describing its location as "an excellent good harbor, good lands, and no want of anything but industrious people." (This description proved the incentive, six years later, for the Mayflower Pilgrims to relocate here from their first, unsatisfactory settlement in Holland.) In mid-July, after just six weeks, Smith returned to England, but in that remarkably short span of time he had accumulated the raw materials for this highly accurate and thorough map of the New England coastline. The map, engraved by Simon van de Passe, was published as part of Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, one of the most important books in the history of the colonization and settlement of America.

Often described as "The foundation map of New England cartography, the one that gave it its name and the first devoted to the region". Smith's *New England* is one of the few maps that is not only a primary historical source but also in fact influenced history. It was consulted by the Pilgrims prior to their voyage to America, and Smith's laudatory account of the Plymouth area (which Smith named) induced the Pilgrims to settle there, after their first landfall on Cape Cod proved unsatisfactory. Few of the other place names on the map survived. To curry favor with the court, Smith allowed the young Prince Charles to select the place names, all of which referred to members of the Royal Family and nobility.

There are nine states of the extremely rare English edition, many of which were published well into the 1630's. Unlike Smith's map Virginia, which abounds in later derivatives, this map was not re-published in any other form until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.



New England. SMITH, CAPT. J./HULSIUS, L.  
[Frankfurt, 1617] New England. 11x13.5 inches.