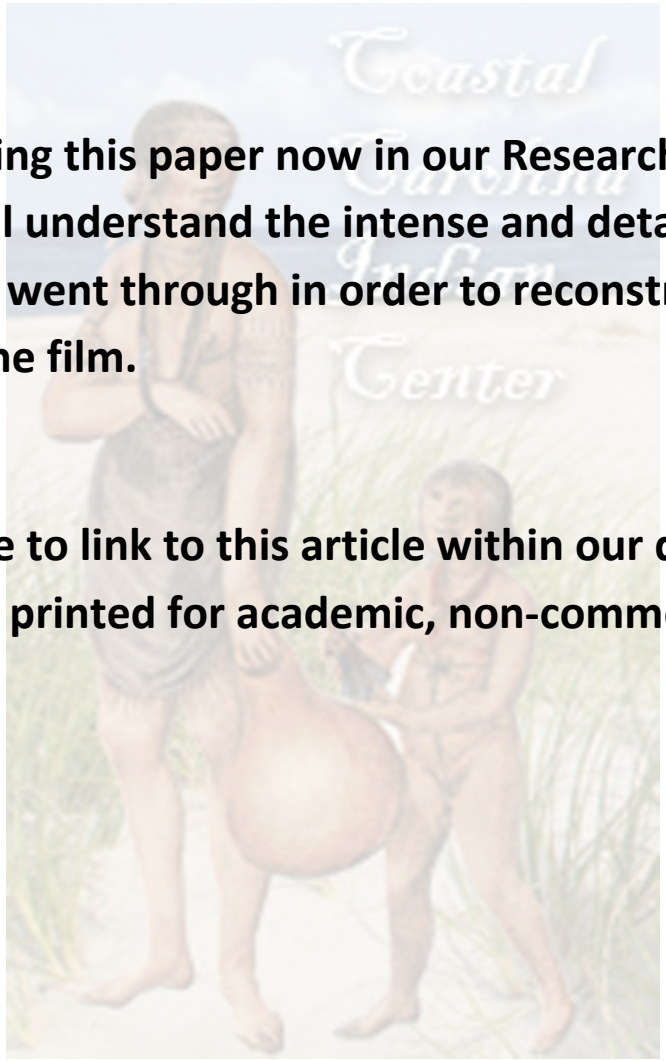
The following document was provided to Coastal Carolina Indian Center (www.coastalcarolinaindians.com) by Dr. Blair A. Rudes in 2006. This was sent to us Dr. Rudes when we were working on covering his Algonquian language work for the major motion picture, *The New World*.



We are providing this paper now in our Research Database so that others will understand the intense and detailed process that Dr. Rudes went through in order to reconstruct the language for the film.

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Giving Voice to Powhatan's People:

The Creation of Virginia Algonquian

Dialog for "The New World"

I. Introduction

When the English explorers and colonists first arrived at the location that would become Jamestown Colony, they were welcomed by citizens of the Powhatan Confederacy – an empire named for its powerful leader who reigned over a region that covered most of present-day southeastern Virginia – from the southern shores of Chesapeake Bay to the border with North Carolina – as shown in the map, taken from Gleach (997:2223), on the next page. The vast majority of the citizens of the confederacy spoke dialects of a language that has come to known as Powhatan, but which is more properly labeled Virginia Algonquian. The Virginia Algonquian language was one member a large family of related languages spoken in North America from the coast of North Carolina (Chowan, Pamlico, Roanoke) to the Mid-Atlantic Coast (Munsee Delaware, Nanticoke, Unami Delaware) and New England (Abenaki, Mahican, Massachusett, Mohegan, Natick, Passamaquoddy-Malecite, Penobscot, Pequot, Quiripi), and from eastern Canada (Algonquin, Micmac, Montagnais, Ottawa) across the Great Lakes Region and the upper Great Plains (Cree, Fox, Menominee, Miami-Illinois, Kickapoo, Ojibwe, Patowatomi, Shawnee) to the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains (Arapaho, Blackfoot, Cheyenne).

As preparations were getting underway in the fall of 2003 for the production of "The New World," the Director – Terrence Malick – decided that a faithful rendition of the events surrounding the founding of Jamestown required that Powhatan and his subjects speak the Virginia Algonquian language when they first encountered the English. The producers then began a search for someone who could make that happen. Their task was not an easy one if for no other reason than the fact that no one had spoken the Virginia

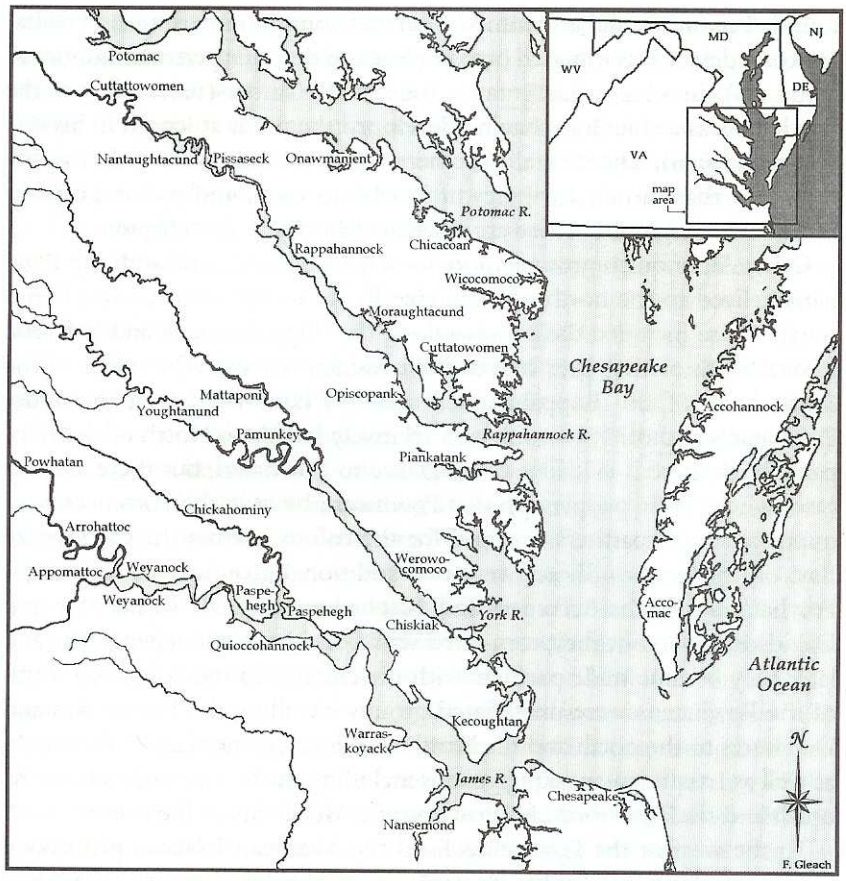

FIGURE 2. Principal Powhatan and Neighboring Districts

Algonquian language since sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, nearly all of the more or less closely related Algonquian languages that had been spoken along the eastern seaboard prior to European settlement had also fallen into disuse long ago. In fact, the only Algonquian languages still spoken on the east coast are Passamaquoddy-Malecite in several communities in Maine and Micmac in New Brunswick. However, none of the speakers of Passamaquoddy-Malecite or Micmac were available to work on the film during the time period set aside for production.

Several Algonquian communities in the East whose languages have not been spoken for a century or more have efforts underway to recover their languages and return them to daily use. Since creation of dialog for the "The New Word" in the Virginia Algonquian language would require the same kind of effort as was already underway to revive the

ancestral languages at such Algonquian communities as the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation in Connecticut and the Wampanoag Indian Community in Massachusetts, the producers were referred to the handful of linguists – language scientists – who were assisting these communities in their efforts. To make a long story somewhat shorter, I and a colleague, David J. Costa, were at the time working with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation to reawaken the Pequot language, and only I had the time available to work with the film producers. So, they were stuck with me.

Immediately after I agreed to work on the film, and before the script arrived in the mail, I began collecting everything that was known about the Virginia Algonquian language – not a particularly difficult task. Nearly everything we know about the language comes from two word lists that were prepared in the seventeenth century. Sometime between 1607 and 1609, John Smith wrote down a short list of words and phrases that he had learned and found useful. The word list was first published in 1612, and again in 1624. A few years later – sometime between 1610 and 1611 – the secretary for the Jamestown Colony, William Strachey, prepared a much longer list of words and phrases in the language that included the words written down by Smith, as well as vocabulary that Strachey obtained from other colonists and from Indians who visited the Colony. The information in Smith's and Strachey's vocabularies amounts to about 600 words, not a particularly large number when one realizes that a typical desktop dictionary of English such as *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* provides definitions for several thousand words. A small number of additional words from the Virginia Algonquian language were written down by later explorers and settlers.

I was not the first linguist to examine the available information on Virginia Algonquian and try to make sense of it. The first important study of the language was prepared by the Reverend James Geary, an anthropologist on the faculty of the Catholic University in Washington, D.C. His work appeared as an appendix to what is generally considered to be the linguistically most accurate printing of Strachey's word list, the 1953 edition by Louis B. Wright and Virginia Freund. The second major linguistic study was authored by Frank T. Siebert, Jr., a avocational linguist, in 1975. In addition, Ives Goddard – linguist

with the Smithsonian Institution – has discussed Powhatan vocabulary in a number of his publications, mostly importantly in a 1980 publication. The researches of these scholars was invaluable to my own work.

To prepare for translating dialog into Virginia Algonquian, I needed first to get a good idea of how the language might have sounded and how words and sentences were formed. Since no sound recordings of the language were every made, I had to rely on two assumptions. The first assumption was that the pronunciation of Virginia Algonquian would not have been too different from the pronunciation of related Eastern-Algonquian languages such as Munsee Delaware for which sound recordings do exist. Secondly, I had to assume that Smith and Strachey had been reasonably accurate in rendering Virginia Algonquian words as best they could using the spelling conventions of early seventeenth-century English. I also had to keep in mind that the pronunciation and the spelling conventions of English in the seventeenth century differed in important ways from the pronunciation of modern English as spoken in England and the United States. To illustrate, the spellings of the word *aamowk* 'angle' suggested a pronunciation in which the first vowel was similar to the first vowel of English *amen*, written [a] in the symbols used in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA); the fact that Strachey used two rather than one letter a's to spell the word further suggested that the vowel was noticeable longer than the vowel in the English word, i.e IPA [a·]. By the spelling *ow* for the second vowel, Strachey might have intended the vowel in English *low* (IPA [o]) or the vowel in English *cow* (IPA [aw] in American English, but IPA [əw] in seventeenth-century English and in the standard dialects of present-day Canadian English). When I went look in related languages for a word that might be pronounced something like [a·mok] or [a·məwk] and meant 'angle' in related Algonquian languages, I at first came up empty handed. It was not until I realized that Strachey did not intend the noun 'angle', a geometric term, but the verb 'angle', a synonym for 'fish', that I discovered appropriate terms in other languages: Natick *aumauôg* 'they fish', Narragansett *aumaûi* 'he is fishing', and Old Delaware *a-man* 'fishhook'. The Virginia Algonquian words is in fact essentially identical to the Natick form. In the practical orthography I developed for the language, the word is spelled ámewak 'they fish' and pronounced [ɑmewk] due to the

dropping of the vowel [a] in everyday speech that is characteristic of Virginia Algonquian and other Eastern Algonquian languages.

I applied these same steps to nearly all of the words in Smith's and Strachey's word lists and concluded that Virginia Algonquian possessed the following sounds: the consonants *p*, *t* and *k*, which were pronounced like the same letters in the English words *spill*, *still*, and *skill* (IPA [p, t, k]); *c* pronounced like the *ch* in English *chill* (IPA [tʃ]); *s* and *h* as in English *sill* and *hill*; *m* and *n* as in English *mill* and *nill*; and *w* and *y* as in English *will* and *yell*. The Virginia Algonquian languages also possessed a sound similar to English *r*; however, it was different enough from the sound of English r that Smith and Strachey sometimes wrote it in different ways. For example, Smith wrote *nemarough* as the word for 'a man' while Strachey wrote the same word as *nimatewh*. Such spelling differences suggest that the r in Virginia Algonquian was similar to the single r in a Spanish word like pero 'for, because', that is, a single, rapid tap of the tongue (IPA [ɾ]) not unlike the sound heard in American English for the spelling *-tt-* in words such as *fitting* or *fitter*. y bidder or wider or in American English Notably, the Virginia Algonquian languages did not possess sounds comparable to those typically spelled in English with *b*, *d*, *f*, *g*, *j*, *l*, *ng* (as in *sing*), *th* (as in *thing* or *the*), *v*, or *z*.

Virginia Algonquian appears to have possessed six vowels: *i* as in English *pizza* [IPA [i], *e* as in English *café* (IPA [e]), *a* as in American English *father* (IPA [a]), *á* somewhat like the aw in English *law* (IPA [ɑ]), *u* as in English *but* (IPA [ə]), and *o* as in English *note* (IPA [o]).

The material in Smith's and Strachey's word lists offered very little information about the ways in which the Virginia Algonquian language formed new words or new sentences. The few bits of information they contained indicated that the patterns for forming words and sentences in the language were essentially the same as those found in other Eastern Algonquian languages. Therefore, I decided that I would use the grammars of such well described languages as Munsee Delaware and Natick as guides to what could be expected in Virginia Algonquian. The structure of words in these languages, in particular verbs, is

far more complicated that in English. For example whereas in English, the form of a verb such as *see* stays the same after the pronouns I, you, we, and they (i.e. I see, you see, we see, they see) and adds an ending only after the pronouns he, she, it (i.e. he sees, she sees, it sees), in Munsee Delaware there are different endings (suffixes) and beginnings (prefixes) for each person, i.e. *ngáwi* 'I sleep', *kkáwi* 'you (singular) sleep', *kawíi* 'he, she, it sleeps', *ngawíiwun* 'we (I and others) sleep', *kawíiwun* 'we (I and you) sleep', *kkawíiw* 'you (plural) sleep', *kawíiw* 'they sleep'. Other differences between the grammar of an Eastern Algonquian language such as Virginia Algonquian and English are noted where relevant in the following discussion of translations.

Once the script for the movie arrived, my job was to translate the dialog for two scenes of the movie into Virginia Algonquian. Perhaps the clearest way to illustrate what my job involved is to walk through the steps I took to translate a couple of lines. For present purposes, I will use a piece of dialog written for Powhatan's interpreter for use during Powhatan's first encounter with John Smith.

When Powhatan (August Schellenberg) meets John Smith (Collin Farrell) for the first time, he asks him whether he comes form the sky. In the original script, Smith responds by saying:

SMITH The sky? No. From England – a land to the east.

Powhatan's interpreter then has the job of translating Smith's words in Virginia Algonquian for Powhatan. Before I could even begin preparing the translation for the interpreter, I had to decide whether the dialog would have made sense to a speaker of Virginia Algonquian at the first encounter with the English. In the present case, there was clearly a problem since prior to the arrival of the English, the native peoples on the Atlantic coast from Virginia to New England had no personal knowledge that there was a land to the east across the ocean. It is important to remember that Europeans themselves had only "discovered" that there was land on the opposite side of the ocean from Europe about 100 years earlier. Although Powhatan's people had probably heard about earlier

contacts between the fair-skinned and bearded Europeans in other parts of the Americas, and had themselves met Spanish missionaries during a brief attempt to establish a mission to the Virginia Algonquians some thirty years earlier, they had never personally set foot in Europe. Thus, a land to the east would have been more myth than reality at the time. On the other hand as a result of slave-raids by the Spaniards along the Atlantic coast in the sixteenth century, it is likely that some Virginia Algonquians had been taken to the Spanish-controlled islands in the Caribbean, and they were thus aware of islands off the coast. I therefore paraphrased the original English dialog in such a way as to retain the original meaning but reflect the knowledge Powhatan's people had of the world at the time. It now read:

SMITH The sky? No. We come from England – an island on the other side of the sea.

I was now in a position to being preparing the Virginia Algonquian lines for the interpreter.

Nearly all of the words that the translator says are documented words of Virginia Algonquian. Using the spelling of English words at the time as his guide, William Strachey wrote Virginia Algonquian *Arrokoth* 'the skie', *Mattath* 'noe', *Mennunnahgus* 'an Island' and *Yapam* 'the Sea' (Wright and Freund 1953:175, 189, 193, 200). By comparing the words as written down by Strachey with words having similar meanings in other Algonquian languages, we arrive at a better picture of their actual pronunciation. Virginia Algonquian Arrokoth 'the skie' is related to words meaning 'cloud' in related languages. The form reconstructed for the parent language, Proto-Algonquian, is **a·lahkwatwi* 'cloud' (Hewson 1993:34). Regular changes in pronunciation that occurred in the history of the Virginia Algonquian languages would have been produced (IPA) [ˈɑrahkwat]) , which I write in a practical orthography as *árahqat*.

The Virginia Algonquian word *Mattath* 'noe' is clearly the same word as Munsee Delaware *mahta* 'no', and I write it here as it is written in Munsee. The words *Mennunnahgus* 'an Island' and *Yapam* 'the Sea' have are distinctly Virginia Algonquian

words and are not exactly like words in any other Algonquian languages. However, they are similar enough to words have the same meaning that we can make a reasonable guess that they were pronounced (IPA) [mənəˈnakʷas]) and (IPA) [yaˈpɑm], which I spell in the practical orthography *mununaqas* and *yapám*. The word *Mennunnahgus* appears to have actually been the plural form meaning islands. The singular form would be *mununaq*.

None of the early colonists or settlers wrote down the Virginia Algonquian expression meaning 'across (the waters), on the other side (of the waters)'. However in all of the Eastern Algonquian languages, the word carrying this meaning has essentially the same form. Assuming it existed in Virginia Algonquian, it would have been pronounced [aˈkɑməŋk] and spelled in the practical spelling *akámunk*.

Finally since this was the first meeting between a member of the Powhatan Confederacy and an Englishman, the name 'England' would have been unknown and there would be no translation. Later after the Powhatan people had become familiar with Englishmen, they came to refer to them as *Tahshantas*, a word that appears to have simply meant 'foreigners'. In the present dialog, however, the interpreter does what any person hearing a name in a foreign language would do; he tries his best to reproduce the name in the sounds available in his own language. Since the Virginia Algonquian language lacked the sound *l*, the interpreter substitutes the closest sound in the language, *r*. Also since the language does not allow combinations of consonants such as *-nkr-*, the interpreter adds an extra vowel to make the word pronounceable. The result is *Inkurunt*, to which the interpreter adds the general locational ending *-unk* 'at, in; place' to give *Inkurunt-un* 'England'.

Having "translated" the individual words of the dialog, it remained to put them together into grammatical Algonquian sentences. Unlike English, Algonquian languages do not form questions simply by raising the tone of voice at the end of a phrase. Instead, they put a special word called a question particle at the beginning of the question. We do not know what word was used for this purpose in Virginia Algonquian; I borrowed the word *sá* (IPA [sɑ]) from the Natick language to serve this purpose. Also, the Algonquian languages, like Russian and many other languages, do not use definite or indefinite articles comparable to English 'the' or 'a'. Thus, the phrase "The sky ?" is translated "*Sá*

árahqat ?" As in English, the word 'no' – Virginia Algonquian *mahta* – forms a sentence all by itself.

The order of the words in the Virginia Algonquian translation of the last sentence in the dialog differs a bit from the English since an Algonquian speaker would name the place first and then say 'we come from there'. Thus, the words are lined up as *Inkuruntunk* 'England', *kunowámun* 'we come from there', *mununaq* 'island', *akámunk* 'on the other side', *yapám*. Putting the three sentences together, we get the interpreter's translation of Smith's statement:

SMITH	The sky? No. We come from England – an island on the other side of the sea.
INTERPRETER	*Sá árahqat? Mahta. Inkurent-unk kunowámun – mununaq akámunk yapám.*

The Coaching

Since none of the Indian actors cast for speaking roles in the film spoke an Algonquian language – and many had never even heard an Algonquian language spoken, I obviously could not expect them to simply read the Virginia Algonquian dialog and pronounce it correctly the way an Algonquian would say it. Each actor had to be taught to say their lines correctly, just as if they were learning lines in any other foreign language.

As a first step in coaching the actors, I prepared CD recordings of the Virginia Algonquian lines along with the English translation of the lines and the meaning of the individual Algonquian words together with a written copy of the lines. I should note at this juncture that, although my great-grandmother was Abenaki – an Algonquian people from the are of upstate New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Quebec – I am not a native speaker of Abenaki or any other Algonquian language although I have had many opportunities to hear Algonquian languages spoken. As a result, my pronunciation on the CD recordings, which served as the model for the actor's pronunciation, cannot be

considered to anything but a rough approximation of how a native speaker of Virginia Algonquian would have pronounced the lines. Having said that, I should also note that there are no living native speakers of Virginia Algonquian nor have there been any for a couple of centuries. Thus, my pronunciation was probably just as good a model for the actors as the pronunciation of anyone else alive today. Once the recordings and written scripts were ready, they were sent to the actors so that they could have a couple of weeks to practice their lines before I met with them in person on location.

When I finally met with the individual actors on set, I found, not unexpectedly, that each one had taken his or her own approach to learning the dialog. Certain actors had rote memorized the Virginia Algonquian lines exactly as I had spoken them on the CDs. They had done an excellent job and there was little else I needed to do to help them. Other actors had chosen to learn the pronunciation and meaning of each individual word in the sentences that comprised the dialog. Because of their attention to individual words, their pronunciation of the Virginia Algonquian lines tended at first to be choppy and unnatural. I worked with these actors every day over the next several weeks, and in the end, their learned to say their lines in a convincingly natural fashion. I must say I was impressed by the seriousness with which the actors approached the task of learning the language and with their skills at quickly learning to speak the lines.

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