

# The Identity of the 1608 Jamestown Craftsmen

by

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Several nationalities and ethnic groups today voice pride in Jamestown's 400th Anniversary as the first permanent English colony in America. Although the colony eventually received Italians, Africans, and others, among the earliest known contributors were eight "Dutch-men and Poles," and a Swiss man, who arrived with the "Second Supply" from London, aboard the ship *Mary and Margaret* around October 1, 1608.<sup>1</sup> The company recruited these as skilled master craftsmen and industry specialists: soap-ash, glass, lumber milling (wainscot, clapboard, and "deal"—softwood lumber), naval stores (pitch, turpentine, and tar), and mining. All were hired to teach and organize new industries; not so much to do the work but to train the colonists.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the colonists, who were company shareholders or servants of shareholders, these were probably contractors, and their names do not appear on the list of colonists in the ship's manifest. Only the mining and ores specialist is known definitely as a "Zwitzar" (Swiss) man named

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<sup>1</sup>"Mistresse Forrest, and Anne Burras her maide; eight Dutch men and Poles, with some others, to the number of seaventie persons, &c." John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England & the Summer Isles, together with The true travels, adventures and observations, and A sea grammar*, Volume 1, 1624, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>"And for the making of Pitch, Tarre, Turpentine, Sope-ashes, Deale, Wainscott, and such like, wee have already provided and sent thither skillfull workemen from forraine parts, which may teach and set ours in the way, whereby we may set many thousands a worke, in these such like services," from *Nova Britannia*, 1609, in Alexander Brown, *The Genesis of the United States: A Narrative* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1891), p. 599.

William Waldi (or Volday or Valdo).<sup>3</sup> The national identity of all the other craft specialists requires a degree of conjecture. This article reviews what is known of these craftsmen, and addresses some speculations and enthusiastic claims current in both the academic and popular press.

Why Dutchmen and Poles? Certainly skilled craftsmen worked in England; for example, there were several glass factories near London in 1606. But few English craftsmen were accustomed to working in virgin forest and primitive conditions, since the great British forests had been long since cut down. Many of the glass factories near urban centers did not actually make glass from raw materials, but recycled and bought raw glass ingots from elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Before the age of coal, serious glass industry went where the trees were, since a few pounds of glass ship easier than tons of wood. Another reason might be bargain rate labor. As early as 1585, Walter Raleigh was urged to look to Prussia and Poland for “Men skilfull in burning of Sope ashes, and in making of Pitch, and Tarre, and Rozen ... which are thence to be had for small wages.”<sup>5</sup> Among the most eager recruits for adventure may have been those disrupted by war, and the Polish-Swedish war was current. In the large and diverse Commonwealth this war would have, besides ethnic Poles, also enmeshed Lithuanians, Latvians, Rus, and German-speakers who were Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth citizens and may have been identified simply as Poles. When Smith discussed possible labor sources, he mentioned Russia twice, a descriptive term as likely to mean the Rus lands of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth as the state then usually called Muscovy. As well, ethnic Poles may have hailed from Swedish controlled Pomerania or other lands.

We know almost nothing about the eight with certainty. They were likely young, as were almost all the colonists, yet at least in their mid-twenties to have achieved mastery of their craft. Their actions and fates are known in a few instances. Dutchmen Adam, Samuel, and Francis, and perhaps a fourth, were sent to help build a house for the Indian leader Powhatan, for political relations and to earn food—to “load his ship with corne.”<sup>6</sup> They soon joined Powhatan, aiding and arming him against the English. Smith sent Waldi to entice them back but he played a complicated double cross. Despite this spotty record, Smith gave high marks to the Dutchmen’s work ethic. “Only the Dutch-men and Poles, and some

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<sup>3</sup>John Smith, in Philip Barbour, *The Complete Works of Capt. John Smith 1580-1631* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 487.

<sup>4</sup>This was the practice of urban glassworks since Roman times. See H. E. M. Cool, C. M. Jackson and Jason Monaghan, “Glass-Making and the Sixth Legion at York,” *Britannia*, Vol. 30. (1999), pp. 147-162.

<sup>5</sup>John Brereton, *A Brief and True Relation of the Discovery of the North Part of Virginia* (London: G. Bishop, 1602).

<sup>6</sup>*Generall Historie*, p. 173.

dozen others ... knew what a dayes worke was.”<sup>7</sup> Smith deemed Waldi an imposter who knew little of his craft.<sup>8</sup> Powhatan killed Adam and Francis after they escaped the fort again in 1609,<sup>9</sup> Samuel was killed by the Indians in 1610, as witnessed by the boy Henry Spelman.<sup>10</sup> Waldi later “dyed most miserably”<sup>11</sup> while claiming he had found a valuable mine “the myne which, in his lifetime, he would not be drawn to reveyle unto any one ells of the colony.”<sup>12</sup> We do not know what happened to the other Dutchman (if any) and the Poles. They apparently worked hard and at any rate failed to gain notoriety by fermenting rebellion. Possibly they stayed with the colony and died in the 1610 famine, perhaps they left in 1609-1610 by terms of their contract, or perhaps they survived to 1611 and beyond.

An interesting field of speculation is their religion. The common lay assumption that the Poles must have been Catholic is anachronistic, since in 1607 the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth’s Baltic provinces had large Lutheran and Calvinist populations, including those who spoke Polish, Lithuanian, and German as a first language. Anglicans were almost non-existent outside Britain, so the craftsmen would not have been members of the official religion of the colony and so required some accommodation in any event. Contractors may have been under a different standard than the colonists (who were obliged to swear they were not “Papists”), so some may even have been Catholics. The practice of accommodation should have been well understood by the colony’s leaders—for example, the English navy at this time had protocols to follow for Catholic sailors. We know the colony eventually had some religious diversity since a generation later up to several dozen Jamestown Catholics were exiled. Archeologists have discovered a Catholic-style crucifix from the early Jamestown period, offering an intriguing hint that perhaps the diversity was present from the start. The safer guess is that the 1608 craftsmen were Protestants, or were at least willing to act the part.

Numerous recent articles and books, both popular and scholarly, have built on various speculations to take the position that the “Dutchmen” were Germans. Certainly during the prior century and earlier any Germanic language speaker

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<sup>7</sup>“All this time we had but one Carpenter in the Countrey, and three others that could doe little, but desired to be learners: two Blacksmiths; two saylers, & those we write labourers were for most part footmen, and such as they that were Adventurers brought to attend them, or such as they could perswade to goe with them, that never did know what a dayes worke was, except the Dutch-men and Poles, and some dozen other. For all the rest were poore Gentlemen, Tradsmen, Serving-men, libertines, and such like, ten times more fit to spoyle a Common-wealth, then either begin one, or but helpe to maintaine one.” *Generall Historie*, p. 194.

<sup>8</sup>*Works of Capt. John Smith*, p. 487

<sup>9</sup>*Generall Historie*, p. 197.

<sup>10</sup>Henry Spelman, *Spelman’s Relation of Virginia* (1613), in Brown, p. 414.

<sup>11</sup>*Works of Capt. John Smith*, p. 487.

<sup>12</sup>*Historie of Travaile into Virginia*, p. 132.

might be referred to as a Dutchman, but it would also have been customary to refer to a resident of the Netherlands (Low Dutch speaker) as a Dutchman. By 1608 the “German equals Dutchman” usage was obsolete and thereafter we find few examples in written text where this use is unambiguous.<sup>13</sup> John Smith only once mentions Germany, when he is speaking in abstract terms and not about the specific 1608 craftsmen: “...or yet to send into Germany or Poleland for glassemen & the rest, till we be able to sustaine our selves, and relieve them when they come.”<sup>14</sup> In several works, Smith unambiguously refers to Netherlanders as Dutchmen.<sup>15</sup> The speculation that the Swiss Waldi was counted among the Dutchmen is also advanced as a proof that the Dutchmen were Germans; however, Smith is unclear on this point.<sup>16</sup> While this is another area likely immune to absolute proof, counting the Dutchmen as Netherlanders seems more consistent with the evidence.

A well thought-out analysis associating the nationality with the craft was published by Charles Hatch in a 1941 Article.<sup>17</sup> His analysis stands well today, even considering all the new evidence. What we know of each set of craftsmen follows in summary.

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<sup>13</sup>Germans were rarely if ever called Dutchmen by 1608. A random test of the use of the term “Dutchman” in contemporary English text on *Google Books* found no unambiguous uses of “Dutchman” as German in the first twenty items found. This test is documented and other evidence proffered that these particular Dutchmen were German is challenged in an article in preparation by this author.

<sup>14</sup>*Generall Historie*, p. 150.

<sup>15</sup>In the *Generall Historie* Smith spoke of a “Ship of Holland” and its “Dutch-men” on page 45, a Dutch ship and Dutchmen driven ashore at Massasowat in 1622 on page 72, and on page 183 of the Dutchmen who invaded the West Indies. These Dutchmen are clearly Netherlanders.

<sup>16</sup>Although some German-American booster websites claim Waldi as a “Swiss-German,” with a name like his it is difficult to exclude the possibility that he was actually Swiss-Italian or Swiss-French. Waldi is associated with the Dutchmen first as someone outside the group of Dutchmen when he is sent to negotiate with them, a circumstance that may have many explanations, which results in him joining in their intrigues. Later Smith describes the fate of the Dutchmen conspirators and their confederates, including Waldi; here he is inside the group of Dutchmen, but this seems to be bounded now as a conspiratorial rather than ethnic group.

<sup>17</sup>“Some of the Dutch were carpenters, it is assumed, since they were entrusted with that type of work. Three of the Dutch took refuge with Powhatan in the winter of 1608-1609, and presumably they were not on hand when the trial of glass was made in the spring of 1609. This may imply that the Poles on the beach by the river during his single-handed fight at the glasshouse may be an indication that the Poles lived there.” Charles E. Hatch, “Glassmaking in Virginia, 1607-1625,” *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*, 2nd Ser., Vol. 21, no. 2. (April 1941), pp. 119-138.

## THE LUMBERMEN

The lumber mill-men were probably the three named Dutchmen—Adam, Francis, and Samuel. Smith first states that three, and on the next page that four, Dutchmen were sent to do lumber and construction work in December 1608 (to build a house for Powhatan), so there could have been an additional Dutchman. It is reasonable to suppose that the lumber workers and wood mill-men would use their relevant skills and tools to prepare framing and clapboard materials and then build a house, rather than send the naval-store makers and glassworkers. The master glassmaker especially would have been trained to do all glass precursor work—potash, charcoal, and lime making—all valuable products for the colony even if the glass kiln was cold.

Smith also states that they are going to a place as good as any to work for the colony, which would be true if they needed trees as raw material, and perhaps even a moving water source to run a mill. It is difficult to imagine a plan to seriously manufacture softwood lumber without a water-powered sawmill—standard 1607 technology. Even though a mill of that type is not mentioned, some of the craftsmen are described as millers.<sup>18</sup>

Smith is clear that the trial of glass, soap-ash and naval-stores, but not mill-work, happened during the time these Dutchmen were with Powhatan.<sup>19</sup> Smith mentions that clapboard was sent to England as well,<sup>20</sup> but clapboard is created by manually riving hardwood, not through a milling process, and Smith explicitly states that semi-skilled English colonists were quickly trained to perform that work. Therefore Dutchmen were almost certainly the lumber millers. All told, this is the strongest case for associating a craft with any of the eight.

## THE NAVAL STORES AND POTASH MEN

Almost no clue can be found in evidence from the 1608-1610 period regarding the naval stores and potash men. Several years later, in 1619, documentation associates Poles with the production of tar, pitch, turpentine, and potash in Jamestown. It is exceedingly unlikely that these were the same 1608 Poles, since

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<sup>18</sup>They would necessarily have brought the mill with them, with most parts prefabricated. A mill requires special parts made of seasoned wood of the appropriate type: elm for hubs, pear or apple for cogs, ash for working beams, etc. A large water powered mill requires an axle up to two feet diameter of a wood such as oak: this would take 6 years or longer to season. The Jamestown crew simply could not have constructed a mill with local materials except for frames and other structural pieces.

<sup>19</sup>*Generall historie*, p. 175.

<sup>20</sup>Captain Smith's Letter to the Treasures and Council of Virginia, quoted in Arber, *Smith's Works*, part 2, p. 443.

there were few survivors from the 1610 “starving time” and the casualty rate in other years was also high. It is plausible that replacements were sought from the same source from whom Captain Smith claimed he had found good service. However, this is a weak brand of speculation, and so although we can say these were probably Poles there is also a substantial chance that some were Dutchmen.

### THE GLASSMAKERS<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps because of the “high-tech” implication of glassmaking, or because of the survival of actual glassworks remains, special attention has been devoted to speculation about the identity of the glassmakers. First allow the observation that if three or four Dutchmen were lumber men, and if it is at least possible that the naval store and potash men were Dutchmen, and since at the very minimum two and probably more Poles existed, there is a “body count” problem if we are to believe that yet another Dutchman or two were the glassmakers. That is, either Dutchmen make the great majority of the party, which the wording of the primary sources does not seem to imply, or we run out of bodies to whom we can assign the work. I think potentially significant the fact that when the named Dutchmen deserted, Smith did not send another Dutchman after them to reason with them but instead the Swiss man Waldi. Does this mean there was no other loyal Dutchman to send? We cannot know.

The named Dutchmen—Adam, Francis, and Samuel—used the new glass house on Glass House Point as a hiding place when they smuggled arms out of James Fort. Smith mentions this isolated spot, one mile from the fort, is where the three plotters met. This does not suggest they were glassworkers, since they may well have helped build the glass-house, if they were lumber specialists (as argued above I strongly believe they were), and there were only a handful of named places in tiny Jamestown. No other possibly-existing Dutchmen are mentioned in conjunction with the glassworks.

Later, Smith tells us, he is near the glasshouse when he is attacked by Indians, and there “two of the Poles upon the sands” come to his rescue. This fact is far more suggestive that the Poles were associated with the Glasshouse, since it carries the implication that they were working there or at least nearby. Especially significant, since lumber and potash work was performed even further away. Smith said: “But 30 of us he conducted downe the river some 5 myles from

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<sup>21</sup>Some recent secondary sources speak of glass “blowers,” a term which carries an incorrect implication. As suggested above, industrial glass making in remote lumber-rich areas was primarily concerned with the production of raw glass which might be shipped as ingots to urban glass works for further processing, blowing, and even artistry. Or, conceivably, production of bulk easily shipped products such as window glass. No doubt pieces of tableware were blown as samples for show, but that was not the core mission of the fledgling Virginia glass industry.

James towne, to learne to make Clapboard, cut downe trees, and lye in woods.” This is evidence, even if weak, in favor of the Poles as glassmakers.

The close association with glassmaking and potash making is also suggestive. Potash making, one of the precursor steps for glass, was something that master glassmen had exposure to since the usual seventeenth century practice was to train masters in all the steps leading up to their work. Possibly even the glassman or his assistant had responsibility for potash production. If the potash maker was Polish, as suggested above, this may again be a non-coincidental suggestion that the glassmaker was a Pole. The glassmaker could have been the hypothetical never mentioned fifth Dutchman—not impossible. However this is also not probable, so on this basis I give a slight edge to the Poles as the glassmen.

Beyond that the primary sources are silent. The only new development of the last century of study is the discovery by archeologists that some of the glassmaking tools, and especially a crucible with glass remnants, are from central Germany. On this basis only, William M. Kelso and Beverly Straube state: “The glassmakers have long been thought to be from Poland or individuals from both Poland and Germany (...). Scholars now believe that the Germans were the glassmakers and the Poles were the producers of “the rest”—the pitch, tar and soapashes.”<sup>22</sup>

I have studied all the work published and cannot find a scholarly defense of the “German Glassmaker” thesis or references to other research. The “scholars” mentioned seem to be the authors themselves, and perhaps Philip Barbour, addressed below. Other quotations from Kelso and Straube current in the popular press do not say “believe,” but state categorically that the glassmakers were Germans.

Kelso, an archeologist, described his eureka moment when his team uncovered the crucible with the remnants of glass within, and identified the pot as Grossalmerode-Hessian in manufacture. On this basis, Straube ventured: “current research indicates that the three German glassmakers that arrived in 1608 were possibly from Grossalmerode, a Catholic area of Germany near Kassel.”<sup>23</sup> Kelso and Straube seem to claim to have identified not just the nationality but the hometown of the glassmaker.

Straube and Kelso did not respond to my request for information about any research other than crucible identification; apparently the pot covers the expansive statement “current research indicates.” I would certainly expect Kelso to set great store in the product of his archeological research. It is not the find’s value that is in question, but in the speculative interpretation of the find and how they

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<sup>22</sup>William M Kelso with Beverly Straube, *Jamestown Rediscovery, 1994-2004* (Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 2004), p. 188.

<sup>23</sup>Beverly Straube and N. Lucchetti, *1997 Interim Report on the APVA Excavations at Jamestown, Virginia* (Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 1997).



communicated their speculations to the public as fact.<sup>24</sup>

Some of the found crucibles identified were apparently used as metallurgical assay pots.<sup>25</sup> These would be used by the Swiss metallurgist and the English refiners so the pot's origins and the craftsmen's nationality are disconnected. Crucibles, specialty items made of refractory clay obtainable in only a few places in Europe, were standard international exports that dominated world trade<sup>26</sup>—millions were imported into Britain alone.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, with the status of commodity export, a crucible of Hesse origin proves the glassblowers were Hessian in the same way that the fact that I am writing this on a made-in-China laptop proves I am Chinese; or that the Spanish mercury pots found in Jamestown prove there were Spaniards in the expedition; or the English cullet used proves that the glassmaker was English after all.

It seems unlikely that the agent hiring the glassmaker was deep in Europe rather than in England or in an easily accessible port such as Amsterdam or Gdańsk. Any scenario is unlikely that requires the new Virginia Company (axiomatically short on cash) to give large cash advances to a newly hired man of uncertain trustworthiness, and a large cash advance would have been required if he was to acquire his own materials hundreds of miles away, then to ship a ton of it to England. Far more likely than a shopping expedition to remote central Germany was seeking the hire and supplies in England or an accessible market such as Amsterdam. The pot's origin as evidence for the glassmakers' nationality is dismissible.

Another argument I encountered (in a private conversation) was that when the Dutchmen all die in 1609-10, glass production ceases, yet tar and pitch continues to be made. However, the Dutchmen whom we know die were almost certainly the lumbermen. We know as much about any other Dutchmen's deaths as we know of any Poles' deaths, namely nothing. The craftsmen were brought to train the English and set up industries. Dozens of English were the real labor force, not a few Poles or Dutchmen. Some of the surviving ones may have returned to England in 1609 or 1610, but most people who stayed died, which fate would not have spared the Poles had they remained. Glassmaking ultimately

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<sup>24</sup>APVA <http://www.apva.org/ngex/xwrkplay.html> (accessed March 2007), for example. Numerous of their other publications state without qualification that the glassmakers were German. Straube is also quoted in popular press articles, such as one in *Smithsonian Magazine*, asserting the German nationality of the glassmakers.

<sup>25</sup>According to Kelso's own APVA website that pictures these artifacts, [www.apva.org](http://www.apva.org) (accessed November 2006).

<sup>26</sup>M. Martínón-Torres, T. Rehren, and I. Freestone, "Mullite and the Mystery of Hessian Wares," *Nature* 444, 437-438 (23 November 2006).

<sup>27</sup>M. Martínón-Torres, T. Rehren, "The 'Mystery' of the Post-Medieval Triangular Crucible Reconsidered—A Global Perspective," *Proceedings of 34th International Symposium on Archaeometry*, May, 2004 (Zaragoza).



proved too technically challenging for the colony, and they never found a source of pure quartz sand; tar and pitch are more simple undertakings.

Philip L. Barbour, writing on Jamestown Colony, stated, "...my research into the history of glassmaking in Poland tends to hint that the Poles were hired for pitch and tar work, and the Germans for the glass, despite the vagueness of John Smith's account. There is no evidence that Poland had a glass industry of any great consequence in the days of Zygmund III (1587-1632)."<sup>28</sup> A German-American pride-booster website claims: "The literature of 16th and 17th century glassmaking makes virtually no reference to Polish production. On the other hand, the German glassmaking industry of that period is described at length."

This interesting argument seems to suggest that Poles cannot run complicated glassworks, and if they could, we would have heard of it. Information in English on any aspect of Polish history or culture is scarce, and if Western works do not mention Polish glassworks, it is because Western historians do not read Polish. A Polish scholar generously responded to my request for help and within a day of my emailed request I possessed the relevant parts of *Szkło w Polsce od XIV do XVII w* by Andrzej Wyrobisz. An extract of this has now been published in English.<sup>29</sup> This in-depth scholarly work lists 94 major glassworks in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during this period, a number proportionate to German works considering the base of townsmen customers. Wyrobisz references several articles and books on the subject of the robust Polish glass industry in print when Barbour was researching the "history of glassmaking in Poland."

Barbour did the cause of history a service by challenging several Polish and Polish-American authors who asserted as fact that the glassmakers were Polish, listed with confident authority the names, hometowns, and pedigree of numerous alleged Polish Jamestown pioneers, and detailed their many great feats that saved Jamestown. Names and feats and details not mentioned in the usual primary sources. He debunked as "sheer speculation" or "enthusiastic history" claims based on an alleged 1635 primary source "diary," which had the good taste to vanish.<sup>30</sup> Yet, when he apparently restricted his research on Polish glassworks to his local library, he sent the pendulum swinging in another direction. Now, we can observe that a new generation of published works make new unsubstantiated and unlikely claims about the identity, hometowns and craft specialty of the craftsmen of the Second Supply. The record once corrected by Barbour again requires correction.

We know that there was one Swiss named Waldi, three Dutchmen named Adam, Francis, and Samuel and probably at least one more Dutchman, and at

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<sup>28</sup>Barbour, Philip L., "The Identity of the First Poles in America," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, Volume XXI, January 1964, p. 90.

<sup>29</sup>Rick Orli, "Glass Making in the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth 16th-17th C." [www.kismeta.com/diGrasse/PolishGlassworks.htm](http://www.kismeta.com/diGrasse/PolishGlassworks.htm).

<sup>30</sup>Barbour, p. 90.

least two Poles and probably a couple more. We know the Swiss man was a miner or metals specialist. Beyond that is speculation. The evidence and informed reasoning allow me to speculate with confidence that at least three and possibly four of the Dutchmen were lumber millers or other timber specialists. The glassmaker and an assistant were probably Poles (meaning only somewhat better than even odds). The identity of the potash and naval stores men I believe on some suggestive evidence to be Poles. Perhaps one day the logs or manifest of the *Mary and Margaret* or other evidence will surface, but until then this is what we know or can reasonably guess.