Excerpts from “Instructions by way of advice for the intended Voyage to Virginia”
December 1606

Instructions given by way of advice by us whom it hath pleased the King's Majesty to appoint of the Counsel for the intended voyage to Virginia, to be observed by those Captains and company which are sent at this present to plant there.

As we doubt not but you will have especial care to observe the ordinances set down by the King's Majesty and delivered unto you under the Privy Seal; so for your better directions upon your first landing we have thought good to recommend unto your care these instructions and articles following.

When it shall please God to send you on the coast of Virginia, you shall do your best endeavour to find out a safe port in the entrance of some navigable river, making choice of such a one as runneth farthest into the land, and if you happen to discover divers portable rivers, and amongst them any one that hath two main branches, if the difference be not great, make choice of that which bendeth most toward the North-west for that way you shall soonest find the other sea.

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But if you choose your place so far up as a bark of fifty tuns will float, then you may lay all your provisions ashore with ease, and the better receive the trade of all the countries about you in the land; and such a place you may perchance find a hundred miles from the river's mouth, and the further up the better. For if you sit down near the entrance, except it be in some island that is strong by nature, an enemy that may approach you on even ground, may easily pull you out: and if he be driven to seek you a hundred miles within the land in boats, you shall from both sides of your river where it is narrowest, so beat them with your muskets as they shall never be able to prevail against you.

And to the end that you be not surprized as the French were in Florida by Melindus, and the Spaniard in the same place by the French, you shall do well to make this double provision. First, erect a little sconce at the mouth of the river that might lodge some ten men; with whom you shall leave a light boat, that when any fleet shall be in sight, they may come with speed to give you warning. Secondly, you must in no case suffer any of the natural people of the country to inhabit between you and the sea coast; for you cannot carry yourselves so towards them, but they will grow discontented with your habitation, and be ready to guide and assist any nation that shall come to invade you: and if you neglect this, you neglect your safety.

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Note: A sconce is a detached defensive work; small defensive earthwork or fort.

Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
February 24, 2010