riedly interred without ceremony or coffins lest the natives discover the truth about the incidence of death at the outpost. From the departure of the first ships from England in December 1606 to February 1624—the years of the Company's rule—out of 7,289 immigrants, 6,040 succumbed, or six died for every one that lived. A cemetery with unmarked graves would be their only memorial.[2]

Writing about the first settlers, George Percy declared: "Our men were destroyed with cruell diseases, as Swellings, Flixes, Burning fevers, and by Warres [with Indians], and some departed suddenly, but for the most part they died of meere famine. There were never Englishmen left in a forreine Countrey in such miserie as wee were in this new discovered Virginia." During its entire history, the Virginia Company's officials appear never to have thought it was their duty to see that their colony was properly supplied with food. When Ralph Hamor and Sir Thomas Gates "sailed sadly up the river" to Jamestown in the spring of 1610, right at the end of the "starving time," they found not more than "three score persons therein, and those scarce able to goe [it] alone, of welnigh six hundred, not full ten months before"—a ratio of 1 to 10.[3]

Contemporaries were quick to point out that many of the basic causes of this dreadful mortality originated in the British Isles. An overwhelmingly majority of those people from overseas, whether English, Irish, or African, who landed at Jamestown and spent a brief time there as transients before 1699, was in very bad physical condition on arrival. Before they boarded the ships at London, Southampton, or Bristol, many of the emigrants were suffering from malnutrition, some with jail fever, and others with various communicable diseases.

Conditions on shipboard during the Atlantic crossing can be