

## **Industries**

### **Silk**

### **Colonial Time**

In Europe, silk was a prized commodity during the seventeenth-century. France had a thriving industry and King Charles II of England wanted to have one in his own colonies. In the late 1630's, experimentation with silkworm farming began in Virginia. It was encouraged by two Royal Governors, Sir William Berkeley and Edward Digges. Virginia wanted to produce something for the mother country that she could not produce in great quantities for herself. Also, the colony did not want its entire economy to be based just on tobacco.

In 1665, the Assembly of Virginia passed a law requiring each planter in the colony to plant ten mulberry trees for every hundred acres owned. This was done because silk worms fed upon their leaves.

In the mid 1700s, Thomas Ludwell Lee (1730-1798 - brother of Francis Lightfoot Lee and Richard Henry Lee, signers of the Declaration of Independence) attempted to produce silk on his Stafford property, Berry Hill. Supposedly, it received its name from the fact that he planted his entire property with mulberry trees. Other Stafford property owners also attempted to produce silk. For example, William Fitzhugh of Chatham was very interested in experimental farming including silk production.



Unfortunately, the silk worms did not flourish in Virginia, and despite years of dedicated effort, silk production never progressed beyond the experimental stage. The Potomac-Accakeek Creek area, however, still has quite a few mulberry trees, descendants of the Lee plantings.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a silk factory in Fredericksburg in which many Staffordians worked. See: Industries – silk – child labor.