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History is past Politics and Politics are present History.—*Freeman*

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THE HISTORY OF SUFFRAGE  
IN VIRGINIA

By JULIAN A. C. CHANDLER, Ph. D.

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## PREFACE

This monograph and my previous paper on "Representation in Virginia," published in the Fourteenth Series of the Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, form chapters of a Constitutional History of Virginia, which is now in preparation. At the present moment great interest centers in the governmental history of the State, as Virginia is upon the eve of adopting a new Constitution. In view of this fact, it is to be hoped that this paper, by tracing out the history of suffrage in Virginia, may be of service in the discussion of the all-important question, the elective franchise. It is generally conceded that, though many subjects of great political interest are now before the people of the State, none is more important than the suffrage question. The Constitutional Convention was called primarily for the purpose of making changes in the electorate.

Thanks are due to Professors Herbert B. Adams and J. M. Vincent, of the Johns Hopkins University, and to Mr. W. W. Scott, of the Virginia State Library, for valuable suggestions in the preparation of this essay.

J. A. C. CHANDLER.

*Richmond, Va., May 1, 1901.*



## THE HISTORY OF SUFFRAGE IN VIRGINIA

### CHAPTER I.

#### SUFFRAGE BEFORE 1830.

In 1619 the people of Virginia were, for the first time, granted the rights of suffrage. At that time came Governor Yeardley who, as an officer of the London Company, established in Virginia a representative form of government<sup>1</sup> and called the first Legislative Assembly that ever met on American soil. In the writs which ordered the election of "Burgesses," he ordained that they should be elected by the "inhabitants" of the colony.<sup>2</sup>

Two years later Sir Francis Wyatt, who came as the successor of Yeardley, brought to the colony the famous "Ordinance and Constitution" of July 24, 1621. By this constitution the privileges which had been granted by Yeardley were affirmed by the London Company, and again it was stated that the Burgesses were to be chosen by the "inhabitants."<sup>3</sup>

At first glance one would think that the Virginia Colony had universal suffrage, that both men and women exercised the privilege and duty of voting; but, if we read between the lines the election law of 1646 (a law enacted with reference to the mode of conducting elections, and in no way intended to define an elector's qualifications), it is evident that the right of suffrage was granted only to freemen, except that "indentured" or "covenant" servants were to be

<sup>1</sup> Chandler's Representation in Virginia (J. H. U. Studies, 14th Ser.), p. 12 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Smith's Hist. of Va., vol. ii, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Hening, vol. i, p. 112.