

**Letter from William Byrd, Lincoln's Inn, London, to Dr. John Woodward, 1697  
August 14: autograph manuscript signed. Transcription by Early Modern  
Manuscripts Online (EMMO). MS X.c.50, Folger Shakespeare Library,  
Washington, DC.**

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No. 52.

Mr Byrd 14 Aug 97.

To Dr Woodward

These

Mr Byrd. Aug. 14. 97

About the Notions of the Americans in  
Virginia Concerning the universal  
Deluge, Dissolution of the Earth. &c.

Dr Woodward

According to your desire I have here sent you the Indian  
account of the manner how shells & other marine bodies came to be repositid  
in the bowels of the Earth, and at great distance from their original habitation.  
And indeed if your quarrelsome adversaries did but know it, they might with  
equal probability assert that you pillaged some part of your Book from the  
Indians as well as from the Ancients. Their notions concerning that matter are  
not very disagreeable, as appears by the following Instance. An Indian priest  
came one day to an Englishman's house, that happened at that time to be sinking  
of a well, & amongst other things he threw up several shells which seemed to be  
the Spolia of some fish, & asked the Indian how it came about that they should  
straggle so far from their proper Element, and be lodged so deep in the Earth?  
I admire says the Indian that you should be an English man & not know that,  
I'll tell you presently how it came to pass. And so taking a Pail, and having  
put into it a little dirt, he filled it up with water, now you must know a  
multitude of years ago (says he) there happened a terrible Deluge that drowned  
all the world except an old man & his wife, (& then with a stick stirring the dirt  
and water together) thus says he by the means of some violent convulsion was  
the Earth and the water jumbled together, and when that ceased the Earth presently  
subsided and all shells & other heavy Bodies sunk down along with it, & each  
took its place according to ~~their~~ its gravity. And these shells which you dug up, have  
lain where you found them out of harm's way, ever since. This remarkable story  
I had from a minister who was told it by the man himself that was digging the  
well, so that there's a great deal of reason to believe 'tis true. And so much I  
can say upon my own knowledge that many of them have a tradition of a Deluge.  
but I must confess I never received from any of them such extraordinary Instance  
of Indian Philosophy as this I have here mentioned. I am very truly

Doctor Your humble Servant

William Byrd

Lincoln's Inn the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 97

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