

**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 B[y]rd 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 bodys came to be repositid in *the* bowels of the Earth, and at great distance from their originall habitation. And indeed if your quarrelsome adversarys did but know it, they might with equal probability assert that you pillag'd some part of your Book from *the* Indians as well as from *the* Ancients. Their notions conc[er]ning that matter are not very disagreeable, as appears by the following Instance. An Indian priest came one day to an Englishmans house, *that* happend at *that* time to be sinking of a well, & amongst other things he threw up several shels *which* seemd to be *the* Spolia of some fish, & askt *the* Indian how it came about that they shou'd straggle so far from their proper Element, and be lodg'd so deep in *the* Earth? I admire says *the* Indian *that* you shou'd be an English man & not know that, I'll tell you presently how it came to pass. And so takeing a Paile, and haveing put into it a little dirt, he fill'd it up with water, now you must know a multitude of years ago (says he) there happen'd 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 wase *the* Earth and *the* water jumbled together, and when that ceas'd *the* Earth presently subsided and all shells & other heavy Bodys 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 <sup>^em</sup> out of harms 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 theres a great deale of reason to believe 'tis true. And so much I can say upon my own knowledge that many of 'em have a tradition of a Deluge. but I must confess I neuer recieud from any of em such extraordinary Instance of Indian Philosophy as this I haue here mentiond. I am very truly

Dr Your humble Servant

William Byrd

Lincoln In *the* 14<sup>th</sup> of August 97

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