

Roanoke Island: The Lost Colony: 1585 -1590

In 1584 **Sir Walter Raleigh** sent two vessels to North America to explore the area for possible future colonies. The ships were captained by **Master Philip Amadas**, who had overall command, and **Master Arthur Barlowe**. The pilot for this trip was Simon Ferdinando. They arrived on the Outer Banks of North Carolina in June and explored the area until August, when they returned to England with their findings. Barlowe wrote, "When we first had sight of this Countrey, some thought the first lande we sawe, to be the continent: but after wee entred into the Haven, wee sawe before us another mightie long Sea: for there lieth along the coast a tracte of Islands, two hundreth miles in length, adjoyning to the Ocean sea, and betweene the Islands, two or three entrances." [Roanoke Island, p50]

In April 1585, Raleigh sent a fleet of seven vessels with approximately six hundred men to North Carolina's Outer Banks and **Roanoke Island**. They were to establish a settlement on land that England officially called Virginia, named in honor of **Queen Elizabeth**.



**Map of
Raleigh's
Virginia**



**Queen
Elizabeth**

The fleet consisted of the 160 ton flagship *Tiger*, captained by **Sir Richard Grenville**; 100-ton *Lion*; 50-ton *Elizabeth*; 140-ton *Roebuck*; 50-ton *Dorothy*; and two pinnaces to act as guides for the larger ships. On the first part of their trip the fleet ran into a storm which scattered the vessels and sunk one of the pinnaces. Eventually six ships arrived in the Outer Banks and Fort Raleigh was established on Roanoke Island. In September the last of the ships left for England, leaving behind 106 men led by **Ralph Lane** to man the fort through the winter.

Ralph Lane was expecting relief vessels to arrive in the spring of 1586. It wasn't until June that the settlers saw English ships, when **Sir Francis Drake** arrived to see how the colony was faring. He was returning to England after raiding Spanish colonies and ships in the New World. While Drake was at the colony a hurricane swept by and caused considerable damage. Drake offered to take the colonists back to England and they did not hesitate to go with him. As Drake and the colonists were sailing for England, the promised relief vessels arrived to find the colony abandoned. They too returned home to England, leaving behind just a handful of settlers.

In 1587, **John White** set out for the Roanoke colony. White planned to pick up the remaining Roanoke colonists and, together with the colonists he brought with establish the 'Cittie of Raleigh' somewhere on the Chesapeake Bay. As White was heading ashore, the Admiral of the Fleet, Simon Fernandes, informed him that he would not be taking the colonists to the Chesapeake Bay because it was too late in the season. White and the colonists would have to stay at Roanoke Island. This was a direct violation of Raleigh's orders, but there was nothing White



**The arrival
of
Englishmen
to Virginia**

could do. White made the most of the situation and that summer did everything in his power to help the colony succeed. It was during this summer that **Virginia Dare** was born, the first child born of English parents in North America. In the fall John White returned to England for supplies, expecting to return the following year with much-needed supplies and more colonists.

Before White left, the colonists agreed that if they had to leave the settlement, they would carve the name of the area they went to on a tree. If there was danger they would add a cross. Because England had entered into a war with Spain, White was not able to return to the colony the following year, 1588.

What do you think kept John White from returning to the colony?

When he did return in 1590, all the colonists were gone. Only the word "CROATOAN" was carved into a tree. Since the word did not have a cross, White believed there was no danger to the colonists. Croatoan was the name of a tribe south of Roanoke Island. Before White and his ship could head for Croatoan, a storm damaged the ship and they had to sail back to England.

Many historians believe the majority of the colonists did not move to Croatoan. They think they went to southern Virginia near the Dismal Swamp, an area that White had explored. They may have assimilated into the Chesapeake tribe. When the Jamestown colonists arrived in 1607, one of their jobs was to look for the "Lost Colony." The Chesapeake tribe did not get along with or pay tribute to Powhatan, so he replaced them with another tribe that did follow him. Chief Powhatan is believed to have killed all of the Chesapeake Indians as well as any English colonists living with them. If there were any colonists left, they may have died in that attack.

What do you think happened to the "Lost Colony"?

