

The Lost Colony

The trail of English settlement in the New World began on the seas. By the mid-1500s Spain had already claimed much of Central and South America. Queen Elizabeth knew that England needed to expand its territory and find new resources, so she sent explorers across the Atlantic Ocean.

Two attempts to establish an English colony failed. But this did not stop Walter Raleigh. With the queen's permission he sent two more ships to find the best location for a colony. On July 13, 1584, the ships arrived on Roanoke Island, on the coast of present-day North Carolina, and claimed the land for England. They returned home with two American Indians and maps and drawings of the area. The new colony was called Virginia.

In 1585 Raleigh sent more than 100 men to settle the colony. After less than a year the colonists were facing unfriendly Indians and a food shortage. They abandoned the area and sailed back to England. But Raleigh refused to give up. In 1587 he sent three more ships with 117 colonists, including 17 women and nine children. John White had been appointed governor of the colony. He took his daughter Eleanor and her husband, Ananias Dare, on the voyage.

When the ships landed on Roanoke Island, the group went to the site of the abandoned colony. The colonists repaired the homes and began their new lives. On August 18, 1587, Eleanor Dare had a baby girl, Virginia. She was the first English child born in the New World.



Supplies began to run low very quickly. But the colonists had fought with the Indians and could not ask them for food or help. Governor White prepared to sail to England to get more supplies. He told the colonists to carve their location on a tree or post if they had to leave before he returned. They were to also carve a cross if they were in danger.

On August 27, 1587, White left on what he hoped would be a quick trip to England. When he arrived, England was preparing

for war with Spain, and every ship was needed. The war delayed White's return for three years! He finally reached the island on August 18, 1590. It was his granddaughter Virginia's third birthday. But the colony had vanished. One word, CROATOAN, was

carved on a post, and there was no sign of a cross. Storms and dwindling supplies prevented White from searching for the colonists, and he returned to England.

What happened to the Lost Colony? One theory suggests that the colonists joined the Croatoan tribe and that their descendents are the Lumbee Indians, who settled in Robeson County. Others believe that they starved to death during one of the worst droughts in history. Some say that they tried to return to England and were lost at sea or that they moved north to join Indians there. One day someone may pick up the trail of the Lost Colony and solve the mystery.