



Roanoke: The Lost Colony

One of America's oldest mysteries began over 400 years ago and still challenges historians and archaeologists today. In England's attempt to establish its first settlement, English colonists settled in Roanoke Island and then disappeared, creating the unsolved mystery of the "Lost Colony."

In 1587, years before the Plymouth and Jamestown colonies, England sent a large group of English people to attempt to set up the first English colony in the wild and strange land of America. England had tried to establish a colony in America two years before this, but the colonists ran out of food and returned to Britain.

This second colony landed in August 1587 on Roanoke, an island off the coast of North Carolina that has lots of thick wetlands, tall oak trees, and wildlife. When the colonists arrived on Roanoke, they found the broken-down fort that the first group of colonists had left two years earlier. They decided to set up their belongings and supplies near the fort in Roanoke instead of travel north to the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia as planned.

The colony was made up of about 120 people--90 men, 17 women, and 9 children. The governor was John White, an artist who had been one of the colonists in Britain's first attempt to set up a colony in America. Another important colonist in the group was Eleanor Dare, who was pregnant when she arrived on Roanoke and had her baby during her first month on the colony. Eleanor's baby girl, Virginia Dare, became the first English person born in America.

After the colonists had spent a couple months in Roanoke, John White decided to go back to England for more supplies such as food and weapons. He intended to return to Roanoke Island right away, but war between England and Spain delayed him.

When White finally returned to Roanoke three years later in 1590, he discovered that the colony was gone. The colony area had a high fence called a palisade built around it, but all the houses, ships, and people were gone. There were no signs of life anywhere.

The only clues left were the cryptic words "Croatian" carved on one of the palisade posts and the letters "C-R-O" carved into a nearby tree. The words could have been a reference to a tribe of friendly Indians who lived south of Roanoke Island on Croatian Island (now called Hatteras Island).

There was no carving of a cross or message of distress that White had asked the settlers to use in the event of forced departure from Roanoke Island. John White planned on going to Croatian Island to see if the colonists had moved there with the Croatians', but a great storm damaged some equipment on his ship and he was forced to return to England. No modern detectives have found any evidence on Croatian Island that shows that the colonists were there. No search parties were sent from England to look for the colonists, so the colonists were never found.

The mystery remains. What do you think happened to the colonists?

Roanoke: The Lost Colony Theories



Directions: There are at least six possible solutions that could be correct. Under each theory listed below, write supporting evidence from the Roanoke text. Then, circle the theory that you think is correct.

THEORY: The Natives killed the colonists on Roanoke Island.

THEORY: The colonists were all killed on Roanoke Island by disease.

THEORY: Their town was washed away by a hurricane and the people drowned.

THEORY: The colonists were taken hostage by the Spanish.

THEORY: The colonists left Roanoke Island and went to live with the Natives.

THEORY: The colonists left Roanoke Island and went to live in some other place.

