

## An American History Mystery

In the 1500s, a group of people from England came to the American continent to start a new colony. Then they all disappeared. What happened to them? Historians are still asking this question today. It's a true mystery from history. While we can't solve the case for sure, we can seek evidence and make informed guesses. Let's start with what we know.

In 1587, Queen Elizabeth of England gave a land charter to Sir Walter Raleigh. The land was located along the Atlantic coast of America, near what was then called Roanoke Island. The European settlers considered it part of Virginia, even though Algonquin tribes such as the Roanoke and the Croatoan already lived in the area. Today this stretch of coast is part of North Carolina, and the island is Hatteras Island.

Sir Walter Raleigh chose John White, an English artist, to lead the new settlement. He sailed to America with over 60 men, 20 women, and a dozen children. One of the women was White's own daughter. She was pregnant at the time and eventually gave birth to the first European baby born on American soil. The baby was named Virginia Dare.

The settlers landed at several islands during their journey and finally arrived at Roanoke Island. They had planned to sail further north to Chesapeake, but the ship's captain dropped them off and there they stayed.

Life was not easy. Many of the colonists got sick. They began to run out of food and supplies. They fought with the local tribes. One of the tribes, the Croatoan, was peaceful and friendly. But when an English settler was killed by a Croatoan enemy tribe, the English mistook the Croatoans for the murderers and shot at them in the middle of the night.

As summer ended, the settlers worried about whether they would make it through the winter. They were concerned that Sir Walter Raleigh, their sponsor back in England, wouldn't know that they needed help. Even if he sent help, he would probably send it to Chesapeake, where they were supposed to land, not to Roanoke Island. The colonists decided to send someone back to England to let Raleigh know what was going on in the new world.

John White was elected to make the trip back to England. He buried his belongings and set sail. Before her left, he told the colonists that if they decided to leave the settlement while he was away, they should carve the name of where they were going into a tree. He also told them to carve a cross if there was trouble.

White expected to return in half a year, but he got caught up in the war between England and Spain. After an arduous journey both ways, he finally made it back to Roanoke in 1590, almost three years after he had left.

When White and his crew landed, they blew trumpets and called out to the settlers. No one answered. The colony was completely empty. The village looked ransacked. There were no supplies left, and storage chests were overturned. The belongings that White had buried were gone. Carved into a tree were the letter CRO. On a post the word CROATOAN was written. There was no cross indicating trouble. What could it all mean?

There are five main theories about what happened to the settlers. The first idea is that they were killed by the local native people as revenge, or by the Spanish who wanted to claim the same land. The second theory is that the colonists lived with the Croatoan and became a part of their tribe. The third guess is that the colonists tried to sail back to England and were lost at sea. The fourth idea is that half of the settlers sailed north to Chesapeake and the other half went to live with the Croatoan. The final theory is that Virginia Dare was raised by the Croatoan people and a medicine man turned her into a white deer.

Some of these theories have more evidence than others. There was no sign of distress at the colony site. Some descendants of a local people called the Lumbees claim to have European ancestors. The ship the colonists possessed after White sailed back to England was quite small. A white doe is sometimes sighted in the North Carolina forests. What does this evidence point to? Do you have a theory? Archeologists and historians are still looking



for clues. Maybe one day you will be the person to solve the mystery of Roanoke.



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NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is the name of the first European baby born in America? (Literal)
  - a. Elizabeth White
  - b. Jane Doe
  - c. Emily Roanoke
  - d. Virginia Dare
  
2. How many women joined the Roanoke colonists? (Literal)
  - a. More than 60
  - b. 20
  - c. a dozen
  - d. none
  
3. What evidence supports the theory that the colonists were killed?  
(Inferential)
  - a. There was a cross marked on a tree.
  - b. A white doe has been sighted in the North Carolina forest.
  - c. The colonists had mistakenly killed Croatoan people.
  - d. The Lumbee people claim to have European ancestors.
  
4. If we believe that the settlers followed John White's directions, which theory of their disappearance would be most likely? (Inferential)
  - a. The settlers left to live with the Croatoan people.
  - b. The settlers were killed by the Croatoan people.
  - c. The settlers were turned into deer.
  - d. The settlers sailed home to England.

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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