

Roanoke – Background Information

In 1584, Queen Elizabeth I granted a charter to Sir Walter Raleigh. The charter allowed him to establish an English colony in North America. The colonists would find riches to send back to England. The colony would also be a base for privateering. Privateers were similar to pirates, but they had the queen's permission to raid ships. The privateers hope to raid Spanish ships for gold.

A group of about 100 men, including Sir Walter Raleigh, set sail for North America. They landed in the Outer Banks of North Carolina on a small area of land they called Roanoke Island. They built a settlement named Fort Raleigh. Some Native American tribes already inhabited this area. These tribes included the Croatan, Hatteras, and Lumbee. The settlers wanted to trade with the tribes, but they also attacked the Native Americans. After several attacks, the Native Americans no longer trusted the settlers. Due to the lack of supplies, all but 15 men left the colony.

In 1587, Governor John White led a second group of settlers, including men, women, and children to Roanoke Island to revive the settlement. The settlers landed and found no one remaining at the fort. Governor White tried to make friends with several of the local tribes, but he found that many were still angry about the attacks by the other group. Governor White left Roanoke Island to go back to England and ask Queen Elizabeth for help. He left 115 men and women, including his newborn granddaughter, Virginia Dare.

Governor White was not able to return to Roanoke Island for about three years. When he did return, he found no signs of the settlers. The houses had been taken down and a fence had been built. There were no signs of a struggle or a battle. The only clues were the word Croatoan carved on a post on the fort and the letters "Cro" on a tree. The settlers became known as the "Lost Colony."

Theory

The settlers gave up and tried to sail back to England. Governor White left the settlers with several small ships. However, these ships would not have been strong enough to make the trip back to England, and the colonists would have probably drowned at sea.