

1600–1610 — “Before there were colonies, there were nations”

The wider world

Europe is still in the long shadow of religious wars and mercantile rivalry. The Dutch consolidate a global trading machine with the **VOC (Dutch East India Company, 1602)**—a chartered giant with powers to wage war, make treaties, and plant colonies. Its success is the financial wind that will later fill Dutch sails toward the Hudson.

(rupertgerritsen.tripod.com)

England experiments with joint-stock colonization: the **Virginia Company** (1606) sends its first settlers to the Chesapeake in 1607. France, under Champlain, fixes a northern toehold by founding **Quebec (1608)**. Spain, already a century in, holds Florida and the Southeast through **St. Augustine (1565)** and a thin chain of missions and garrisons. ([Encyclopedia Britannica](#))

Who is on the ground in 1600–1610? (headcounts you can feel)

Powhatan country (Tsenacommacah, coastal Virginia)

- A powerful **paramount chiefdom** of **30+ tribes**, led by Wahunsenacawh (“Powhatan”).
- **Estimated population in 1607: ~14,000–21,000 people**, clustered along tidal rivers in palisaded towns. This is the demographic reality into which Jamestown intrudes. ([National Library of Medicine](#))

Jamestown & the James River (1607–1610)

- **May 1607: ~104** English colonists begin the fort.
- **1608–1609 supplies** add new arrivals, but disease, drought, and war pinch food.
- **Winter 1609–1610 (“Starving Time”):** roughly **two of every three colonists die; about 60** survive to May 1610, when the **Sea Venture** castaways (wrecked in Bermuda in 1609) arrive with relief. These are tiny numbers, but they dominate English memory of the decade. ([Historic Jamestowne](#))

Hudson River estuary (Lenape/Munsee homelands; *no* Dutch town yet)

- **1609: Henry Hudson**—hired by the VOC—sounds the river later named for him, meets local communities in the bay and up-river; there is **no European settlement yet**.

- Indigenous population in the broader lower-Hudson/Delaware-to-Esopus belt is often put **near ~10,000 around 1600**, living in many small villages and seasonal camps. Think dispersed clusters, not one “tribe” at the river mouth. ([Wikipedia](#))

St. Lawrence (Wendat, Algonquin, Innu neighbors; French beachhead)

- **1608: Quebec** is founded; a few dozen French overwinter as a trading/military outpost among powerful Native confederacies. It is *smaller* than Jamestown but better supplied. ([Encyclopedia Britannica](#))

Spanish Florida (Timucua, Guale, Apalachee provinces)

- **St. Augustine** is the old-timer on this coast. Early-17th-century town size: **on the order of a few hundred** (c. **500–600** mid-century; earlier decades similar scale), plus rotating garrison—tiny by Iberian standards, but a durable hinge for the Bahama Channel. ([Florida Museum](#))

How this decade would have *looked and felt* to people who later become “our” colonists

- **In Virginia (Jamestown):** A raw palisade, brackish water, and diplomacy with a **much larger** Powhatan world. The English are a **small, fragile minority** among tens of thousands of Native people; in the “Starving Time,” survival itself becomes the story. Numbers are intimate: dozens alive, not hundreds—names known to everyone. ([Historic Jamestowne](#))
 - **Around today’s New York Harbor: No Dutch town yet.** Canoes and coastwise craft knit together **Lenape/Munsee** villages; strangers (Hudson’s crew) appear for a few weeks in 1609, trade metal for furs, fire a few muskets, and sail away. The “population center” here is Indigenous—**thousands across many villages**—not European. ([Wikipedia](#))
 - **On the St. Lawrence:** A new **French** storehouse and battery under Champlain, tucked into a deep Native diplomatic network. A few dozen Frenchmen depend on Algonquin and Wendat alliances as much as on ships from France. ([Encyclopedia Britannica](#))
 - **In Spanish Florida:** A worn but persistent town of **hundreds**, its rhythm set by garrison rolls and mission circuits—older than Jamestown or Quebec, but never populous. ([Florida Museum](#))
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Mini-introductions for the separate essays you may want next

1. “Jamestown, 1607–1610: A village among nations.”

Begin with Powhatan headcounts (14–21k), list the ~104 founders and the toll that leaves ~60 by May 1610; describe drought, siege, and the **Sea Venture** link as the pivot between collapse and persistence. Emphasize that every English person knew every other one by name; that’s how small this was. ([Wikipedia](#))

2. “Hudson’s brief visit, 1609: What New York looked like *before* New Netherland.”

A ship’s log framing: canoes alongside, trading in the Lower Bay and the Narrows, then upriver. Close with the **order-of-magnitude** Indigenous population (~10k across river valleys) and the complete absence of a European hamlet. ([Wikipedia](#))

3. “Quebec 1608: A few dozen French in a Native diplomatic sea.”

Champlain’s tiny garrison and storehouse, winter mortality, and dependence on alliance—set against decades-old Native trade routes. ([Encyclopedia Britannica](#))

4. “St. Augustine at 1600 scale.”

An older outpost of **hundreds**, guarding the Bahama Channel; small, soldierly, steady. Use garrison-based estimates to anchor the headcount feel. ([Florida Museum](#))

Why this matters for your “ancestor’s-eye” project

When we later introduce named people (e.g., **Powell** and other Jamestown figures; your Dutch **Volckertszen/Dircks** line arriving decades later; **Morris/Settle** before they touch New York or New Jersey), we’ll drop them into **scenes with believable crowd sizes**:

- **Jamestown 1609–1610:** *dozens*, not hundreds.
- **Hudson estuary 1609:** *thousands of Indigenous residents* in scattered villages; zero Europeans staying.
- **Quebec 1608–1610:** *a few dozen* French.
- **St. Augustine c.1600–1610:** *hundreds* of Spaniards and mixed families.