**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](https://rupertgerritsen.tripod.com/pdf/published/VOC_Charter_1602.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.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](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-de-Champlain?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

**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](https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/196.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

**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](https://historicjamestowne.org/history/history-of-jamestown/the-starving-time/?srsltid=AfmBOorK3XkDLy1whCVbypVIQRE_G0-1qAbZ3qWRkCRyraGoQDc9TSU7&utm_source=chatgpt.com))

**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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Hudson?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

**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](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-de-Champlain?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

**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](https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/staugustine/timeline/growth-diversity/?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

**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](https://historicjamestowne.org/history/history-of-jamestown/the-starving-time/?srsltid=AfmBOorK3XkDLy1whCVbypVIQRE_G0-1qAbZ3qWRkCRyraGoQDc9TSU7&utm_source=chatgpt.com))
* **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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Hudson?utm_source=chatgpt.com))
* **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](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-de-Champlain?utm_source=chatgpt.com))
* **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](https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/staugustine/timeline/growth-diversity/?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

**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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Powhatan?utm_source=chatgpt.com))
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](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Hudson?utm_source=chatgpt.com))
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](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-de-Champlain?utm_source=chatgpt.com))
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](https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/staugustine/timeline/growth-diversity/?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

**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.