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Jamestown was the first successful English colony in North America.

The Mystery of Roanoke

What problems did the Roanoke settlers encounter?

The success of Spain's colonies in the Americas did not go unnoticed. The great powers of Europe were all interested in the rich opportunities available on the other side of the Atlantic. England was no exception. In the late 1500s, English pirates such as Sir Francis Drake had success stealing Spanish treasure on its way from the Americas to Europe. There were even some efforts to start an English colony in North America. By 1584, however, none of these efforts had been successful.

That year, England's Queen Elizabeth gave Sir Walter Raleigh the right to claim land in North America. Raleigh took up this effort with great energy. He sent scouts across the ocean to find a good place for a colony. The scouts made an enthusiastic report of a place called Roanoke Island. This island lies off the coast of what is now North Carolina. At the time, Raleigh called this area Virginia.

Raleigh sent settlers to Roanoke Island twice. The first group arrived in 1585. While they were there, artist John White explored the area and drew pictures of what he saw. In a book illustrated by White, another colonist described the Native American towns:

"Their townes are but small, & neere the sea coast but few, some containing but 10 or 12 houses: some 20, the greatest that we [have] seene [have] bene but of 30 houses: if they be walled it is only done with barks of trees made fast to stakes."

—from *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, 1588

The 1585 expedition produced some valuable information about the people and places of Virginia. Their colony, however, did not survive. After suffering through a difficult winter, the colonists gave up and returned to England.

Then, in 1587 Raleigh sent 91 men, 17 women, and 9 children to Roanoke. John White led this group. Shortly after arriving on the island, White's daughter, who was part of the expedition, gave birth. Virginia Dare was the first English child born in North America.

Nine days after his granddaughter's birth, White returned to England for supplies. Although he had hoped to be back within a few months, White was delayed. His country was at war with Spain. This war featured England's great naval battle with the Spanish Armada. The fighting between England and Spain made it impossible for White to sail back to Roanoke for nearly three years.

When he returned to Roanoke, White found his colony deserted. The only clue he found was a tree with the word Croatoan carved on it. White thought perhaps the colonists had gone to Croatoan Island, about 50 miles (80 km) to the south. Bad weather kept White from investigating. The Roanoke colonists were never seen again.

Explaining Why did the English decide to settle in Roanoke?

Thinking Like a **HISTORIAN**

Analyzing Primary Sources

John White drew pictures of the plants, animals, and people of the region in order to help educate Europeans about North America. For more information about analyzing primary sources, read *Thinking Like a Historian*.

Success at Jamestown

Why did the Jamestown settlement succeed?

For a time, the failure at Roanoke discouraged the English from settling in North America. The idea emerged again in 1606. By then, England had a new king, James I. He wanted to renew England's quest for a colony in North America. Several merchants pressed him for a charter—a document that granted the right to form a colony.

The Virginia Company

The Virginia Company was a joint-stock company, in which investors bought shares, or part ownership. Investors bought shares hoping the company would make money and that they would share in the profits. The plan was for the company's settlers to find gold and establish trade in fish and furs.

James I granted a charter to the Virginia Company of London. In December 1606, the company sent 144 settlers in three ships to build a new colony in North America. In April 1607, the ships entered Chesapeake Bay. They sailed up a river flowing into the bay. The colonists named the river the James and their new settlement Jamestown to honor their king.

Jamestown Survives

The colonists did not find gold or riches in Virginia. Instead they faced severe hardships, including disease and hunger. The colony survived its first two years in part because of 27-year-old Captain John Smith. Smith forced the settlers to work. He also built ties with—and got food from—the local Powhatan people and their chief, who was also named Powhatan.

In late 1609, Smith was injured and had to return to England. The colony struggled. The Powhatan stopped providing food. The winter of 1609-1610 was called "the starving time."

Somehow Jamestown survived this terrible time. More colonists arrived to replace those who had died. The colonists also found a way to make money for the investors. They began growing a type of tobacco using seeds from the West Indies. Soon planters all along the James River were raising this valuable crop.

More Settlers Come to Virginia

The colony of Virginia began to expand. Relations with the Powhatan improved after a colonist, John Rolfe, married the chief's daughter, Pocahontas. The Virginia Company sent women to Jamestown. As a result, marriage and children became a part of life in the colony. The Virginia Company also began giving a headright (HEHD • RYT), or land grant, of 50 acres to settlers who paid their own way to the colony. The headright system helped the colony succeed. The chance to own land lured many settlers to Virginia and gave them a reason to work hard.

The Virginia Company also gave the colonists the right to take part in their own government. In 1619 land-owning male colonists cast ballots for burgesses (BUHR • juhs • uhz), or representatives. The burgesses helped make laws for the colony. The House of Burgesses was the first legislature in North America elected by the people.

The Virginia Colony was growing in size, but it was not making any money for the shareholders of the Virginia Company. In fact, the company faced financial troubles. In 1624 King James took away the company's charter. Virginia became a royal colony, meaning it was directly under the control of the government in England.

Analyzing Why was the House of Burgesses important?

Lesson 1 Review

Review Vocabulary

1. Examine the meaning of *charter* and *joint-stock company* by using each term in a sentence.

2. Write a sentence about the early years of the Virginia colony that use the following terms.

a. headright b. burgess

Answer the Guiding Questions

3. **Describing** What did John White find when he returned to Roanoke after several years in England?

4. **Explaining** Why was the Jamestown colony able to prosper in spite of many hardships?

5. **ARGUMENT** Using primary and secondary source images and descriptions in this lesson, write an advertisement for a newspaper in England that encourages people to come to America in the 1600s.