

# Roanoke Cold Case

## Roanoke

November 1587. A report reaches London that Sir Walter Raleigh's expedition, which left England months before to land the first English settlers in America, has foundered.

On Roanoke Island, off the coast of North Carolina, a tragedy is unfolding. Something has gone very wrong, and the colony - 115 men, women, and children; among them the first English child born in the New World, Virginia Dare -- is in trouble.

But there will be no rescue. Before help can reach them, all will vanish with barely a trace.



The Lost Colony is America's oldest unsolved mystery. For four hundred years, the question of what became of the doomed settlers has remained unanswered. Where did they go? What really happened? And yet, as compelling as this riddle is, Roanoke holds a further surprise, for it comprises not one mystery but two--not only what happened to the colonists, but why?

– Lee Miller, *Roanoke; Solving the Mystery of the Lost Colony*

## Assignment:

You are now detectives. By reviewing some of the evidence that has been collected over the past 400 years concerning the Roanoke mystery, you will determine what happened to the lost colonists of Roanoke. Take the time to review the documents both individually and as a group. Then as a group, you will:

## DOCUMENT 1

### The Lost Colony of Roanoke

From [http://www.essortment.com/all/lostcolonyofr\\_rmhw.htm](http://www.essortment.com/all/lostcolonyofr_rmhw.htm)

John White and the others were sure the colonists were there. They had seen smoke from the area they expected the colonists to be the day before, but since it was late in the day, the small fleet of three ships had decided to wait until the next day before landing. The next morning the ships fired their cannon to signal to the colonists that, after three years, relief had finally arrived. But there was no answer, no sign of life from Roanoke Island.

White, who was the governor of the colony, went ashore, hoping to find 113 people, but there was no happy reunion, no colonists, just three letters, C-R-O, carved on a tree and a bit further on, carved on another tree, the word, "Croatoan".

When White had left the colony three years before, the colonists had been discussing a move north to what we now call Chesapeake Bay. An agreement had been reached that if the colonists did indeed move, they would carve their destination on a tree, with a cross if they had been in distress when they moved. White assumed that the "Croatoan" was a reference to where they had gone, and since there was no cross, White assumed that the move had not been made in desperation. Croatoan Island was south of Roanoke Island. It made no difference to White. He prepared to go to Croatoan, but fate again interfered. A sudden storm blew up and battered the ships. Anchoring off the coast was now too dangerous, and the ships were forced to return to England. White was never able to return to mount another search, and subsequent searches found no trace of the missing colonists. The mystery of the "Lost Colony" had been born.

The English tried to settle Roanoke Island two times. The first, like the second, was sponsored by Sir Walter Raleigh, and was also a failure. White had accompanied this expedition, made up entirely of soldiers with a few specialists, and commanded by a cousin of Raleigh's, Sir Richard Greenville, with Ralph Lane as the colony's governor. White had been the artist and mapmaker. In short order, the colonists managed to alienate the Indian tribes in the area, killing a major chief, Wingina. When Sir Francis Drake stopped at the colony, the colonists abandoned their settlement at Roanoke, and returned to England with Drake.

The second attempt made every effort to succeed where the first had failed. Men, women, and children were in the make-up, showing that these people planned to stay. It was decided that Roanoke Island was inadequate to grow crops for the colonists, so it was planned to settle them north of the Island in the Chesapeake Bay area. Things began to go wrong almost immediately. The pilot of the fleet, one Simao Fernandes, who had also been the pilot on the first expedition, brought the colonists once again to Roanoke, claiming he had no instructions to take them anywhere else and insisted that the colonists off-load on the island. An attempt was made to establish friendly relations with the local tribes with the help of a friendly Indian named Manteo.

Unfortunately, before this could be done, one of the tribes, the Roanoacs, ambushed and killed one of White's assistants, George Howe. Making the same mistake the earlier colony had made, White ordered a "revenge" attack on the Roanoacs, but by a tragic mistake, it was Manteo's tribe, the friendly Croatoans who were attacked. The colonists were able to convince the Croatoans that it was just a mistake, but there can be no doubt that any chance for whole-hearted cooperation had been lost. The ships that had brought the colonists were still off shore, waiting for favorable winds to

return to England. Then the colonists decided that additional supplies were needed and White was chosen to go. He reluctantly agreed.

White hoped to be back the following spring, but there were many obstacles in this path. First, stormy seas delayed his passage back to England, and by the time of his arrival, the threat of the Spanish Armada had caused Queen Elizabeth to commandeer every ship for defense. No ships or any supplies could be spared for White. Even after the defeat of the Armada, the threat of Spain seemed great enough to the Queen, to keep England's ships close to home. It was three years before White was able to return, and he returned too late.

In the four hundred years since 1590, numerous theories have been put forth to explain what exactly happened to the people abandoned on Roanoke Island. One of these theories is that, despairing of ever receiving aid from England, the colonists attempted to return onboard a small boat that had been left for their use, and were lost at sea. Possible, but unlikely. The vessel was a type called a pinnance, carried aboard one of the other ships, and then assembled at Roanoke. Keeping in mind that they had arrived in three ships, it is unlikely that one pinnance would have accommodated them all.

Perhaps one of the Indian tribes in the area had risen up and, in a surprise attack, had slaughtered them all. Again, it seems unlikely. The colonists were aware of the possibility of attack, especially after the killing of Howe, and were heavily armed. An attack, with a resulting massacre would have almost certainly left traces, yet White saw no such evidence upon his arrival. On the other hand, it can't be completely dismissed. If the attack had taken place shortly after White's departure, there would have been a period of three years for Nature to make the signs of massacre disappear. Was the word "Croatoan" an attempt to name their murders?

The Croatoan and Lumbee tribes of today suggest the colony did survive, by merging and gradually being assimilated into their tribes. They point to the fact that gray eyes are often found among them, to their "typically white" features, and to the fact that certain words among them have definite 16th century English roots. The Lumbees, in particular, point out the fact that the last names of the colonists are common among them. Those arguing against this theory point out that all of these things could just as easily be the result of later contact with Europeans and it is unlikely that only a little more than a hundred people could have that massive an impact on an entire tribe.

Another theory that has gained weight in recent years, combines two of the above theories into the following scenario: The colonists indeed move to Croatoan Island, or at least that general area, where a split between two different factions resulted. The majority then move again, this time to the Chesapeake Bay area, and the smaller group stays in the Croatoan country, gradually being absorbed by that tribe and the Lumbees. The larger group prospers, or at least survives until the early years of the 17th century, when they are massacred, probably by Powhatan, famous in history as the father of Pocahontas. Supposedly, Powhatan confessed this to John Smith of Jamestown after they became friends, (following Pocahontas's alleged saving of Smith's life). This happened, according to Smith, because Powhatan was afraid that the Roanoke survivors would link up with the Jamestown colonists and the two groups, especially with the Roanokes' twenty years experience, would be too strong for him to control. The problem here is John Smith is not the most reliable witness who ever lived. Much of his adventures in the New World are today dismissed by scholars as no more than Smith's fantasies.

## DOCUMENT 2

### THE LOST COLONY

From <http://www.coastalguide.com/packet/aboutelizabethangardens.shtml>

The 117 pioneers of Roanoke Island had vanished into the great wilderness. In the following years, evidence as to their fate was slow to emerge, but some intriguing accounts exist. In 1709, English explorer John Lawson visited Roanoke Island and spent some time among the Hatteras Indians, descendants of the Croatoan tribe. In *A New Voyage to Carolina*, he wrote "that several of their ancestors were white people and could talk in a book as we do, the truth of which is confirmed by gray eyes being found infrequently among these Indians and no others."

In the 1880s, with the approach of the Roanoke Colony's 300th anniversary, a North Carolina man named Hamilton MacMillan proposed a theory that holds some credence today. MacMillan lived in Robeson County in southeastern North Carolina near a settlement of Pembroke Indians, many of whom claimed that their ancestors came from "Roanoke in Virginia". According to MacMillan, the Pembrokes spoke pure Anglo-Saxon English and bore the last names of many of the lost colonists. Furthermore, "Roanoke in Virginia" was how Raleigh and his contemporaries referred to Roanoke Island. The Pembrokes also had European features: fair eyes, light hair, and an Anglo bone structure. MacMillan's findings, published in 1888 pamphlet, gained a great deal of attention from the academic community and renewed interest in the lost colony.

Other less plausible theories and some outright trickery surfaced in the mid-1900s. A series of mysterious rocks first uncovered in 1937 in eastern North Carolina seemed to solve the mystery. The original stone, dubbed the Eleanor Dare Stone, was found in a swamp 60 miles west of Roanoke Island by a traveler. It was covered with strange carvings, which, when deciphered, appeared to be a message from Eleanor Dare to her father, indicating that the colony had fled Roanoke Island after Indian attack.

Over the next three years, nearly 40 similar stones were unearthed from North Carolina to Georgia, and when pieced together, related a fantastic tale of the colonists' overland journey through the southeast, culminating in the death of Eleanor Dare in 1599. Although the academic world was skeptical, the media had a field day and were forced to eat their words in 1940 when an investigative reporter exposed the entire saga as an elaborate hoax.

In the past 40 years, scholars have discovered previously unknown records in the Spanish and British archives that may point the way toward a logical, if not provable, solution. Many historians now believe that after White's departure from Roanoke in 1587, the colony split into two factions, and the largest segment of the colony departed for the Chesapeake Bay, their original destination. Lane had explored the Bay area in 1585, and the colonists probably had maps made by White himself.

When John Smith and the Jamestown colonists arrived in 1607, Smith took up the search for the colonists and discovered that they probably had been in the area. In his dealings with the hostile Indian chief Powhatan, he learned that the colonists had lived among the friendly Chesapeake Indians on the south side of the Bay. Threatened by the intrusion of white men into the region, Powhatan claimed to have attacked the colonists and murdered most of them. As proof of his claim, he showed Smith "a musket barrell and a brass mortar, and certain pieces of iron that had been theirs."

By 1612, the Jamestown leaders had received numerous reports that at least some of the Roanoke colonists were living nearby. They sent out several search parties, but had no success, and soon gave up the search.

What became of the remainder of the colonists left on Roanoke Island? Scholars speculate that they were left behind to meet White upon his return from England, but soon fled to Croatoan, leaving the mysterious carvings behind as a signal to White. Spanish archives reveal that they were gone by June, 1588, when a raiding party put in at Roanoke Island only to find the settlement deserted. Scholars assume that they were then assimilated into the Croatoan tribe.

Today, the north end of Roanoke Island is regularly visited by historians and archaeologists hoping to uncover new evidence as to the fate of the colony. So far, none has been forthcoming. The post and the tree bearing the carvings have long since vanished, although many of the live oaks in the National Historic Site were seedlings during the colonists tenure. No archaeological clues as to the whereabouts of the "City of Raleigh" have ever been uncovered, and the 500-acre park remains mostly an enigma, regarding the events that unfolded here 400 years ago.

## DOCUMENT 3

### CAN NEW DIG SOLVE MYSTERY?

From [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/03/0302\\_040302\\_lostcolony\\_2.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/03/0302_040302_lostcolony_2.html)

Souvenir seekers have been digging on Roanoke Island at least since 1653, when trader John Farrar and three friends from Virginia landed on the island and left with artifacts from the English colonies. Union soldiers stationed on Roanoke Island during the Civil War dug for artifacts, and in 1895, Philadelphia journalist Talcott Williams, who was also an amateur archaeologist, did some excavations in the area now enclosed by the national park boundaries.

Professional archaeologists have done several excavations since the late 1940s. They found artifacts undoubtedly left by the colonists, including remains from Thomas Hariot's science laboratory (Hariot was a scientist who was sent to Roanoke). But they didn't find the site of the colonists' village.

The members of the First Colony Foundation hope to learn more about Hariot's laboratory and the location of the village. Their curiosity has been piqued by several clues. In 1982 Phil Evans—who was then a student working at the Fort Raleigh National Historic Site—discovered the remains of an old well thought to be from the 16th century. Evans found the remnants in Roanoke Sound, an indication of serious erosion on the northern end of the island.

In 2000 National Park Service archaeologists using ground-penetrating radar discovered rectangular-shaped objects buried beneath several feet of sand. (Park Service staff did not excavate the objects, but suspect they could be related to Hariot's work.) In 2002 a swimmer stepped on a 16th-century ax head in shallow water just off the northern end of Roanoke Island.

Finding the well and the ax head offshore has prompted some members of the First Colony Foundation to wonder if the site of the colonists' village eroded away and now is submerged. Underwater archaeologist Gordon Watts says that at least 600 feet (180 meters) and perhaps as much as a quarter-mile (0.4 kilometer) of the island has gone underwater since the 16th century. "That's one fact that you cannot ignore," Watts said. "If you're doing a comprehensive search for the 1585-1587 settlement, you can't ignore the possibility that the site is now underwater."

Like any classic mystery, however, there's polite disagreement among some of the experts about where the village might have been. Acclaimed archaeologist Ivor Noël-Hume, who led an excavation in the Fort Raleigh National Historic Park in the 1990s, thinks it's highly unlikely the village site is now underwater. "That's only a personal view, I do assure you," Noël-Hume said. "I wouldn't want to discourage further excavations. But I think you're going to find the remains of the settlement on a piece of land." Noël-Hume says he'd like to see an excavation done in an area of sand dunes near the beach on the northern end. That could be "very informative," he says.

Virginia archaeologist Nick Lucchetti, who also has worked at Fort Raleigh, says he has a reason to believe that maybe the village site hasn't been lost to erosion. "I've talked to collectors who have walked the beach on the north end for 30 years, and they don't have any 16th-century European artifacts in their collections," Lucchetti said.

Despite their disagreements about where the colonial village may have been, the experts concur that the English effort to plant colonies on Roanoke Island was a milestone in U.S. history. "It earned its place in American history when Thomas Hariot worked in the science center and sent back a report that said America is worthy of commercial investment," Noël-Hume said.

Lucchetti thinks lessons learned at Roanoke Island helped ensure the survival of the Jamestown colony 20 years later. Hariot told the Jamestown colonists about the Native Americans' extreme fondness for copper ornaments, and so the colonists brought copper with them. When the Jamestown colonists were on the verge of starving, they traded copper to the Indians for food, and that saved the Jamestown colony from extinction, Lucchetti says.

Still, Evans thinks the mystery of the Lost Colony also is important because it lures people into the story of Roanoke Island. "As long as the Lost Colony is unexplained, it stays fascinating for a lot of people," Evans said. "It's their entry into the story. They go in trying to figure out what happened to the colonists, and then they learn history. I don't want to take away the mystery. That's what makes it different and exciting."

## DOCUMENT 4

### Roanoke Mystery: Evidence and Theories of the Lost Colony

From <http://history.howstuffworks.com/american-history/roanoke-colony2.htm>

So what happened to the Roanoke colonists? Ultimately, no one knows for sure. When it comes to the lost colony, historians are long on theories but short on hard evidence. Gov. John White, the first person to discover the colonists' disappearance, reported everything he saw in a letter. There were no bones, like those that had been left behind from the 1585 colony. The houses had been "taken downe," not destroyed or burned [source: Neville]. The "CROATOAN" carving didn't indicate distress with a Maltese cross. Everything pointed to the settlers simply having picked up and left.

In White's opinion, they moved "[f]ifty miles into the maine," arguably meaning they moved inland, into the forests of North Carolina [source: Keiger]. This idea has appealed to historians over the years; exactly why the colonists moved inland or what became of them afterward if they did ignites new debate.

It's conceivable that the colonists met a less violent fate. The Jamestown colonists sent out several search parties to find members of the lost colony and made a habit of questioning any Native Americans with whom the Jamestown members made contact. Some of these natives told tales of white settlements further down the coast, with two-story, thatched-roof houses, a style unique to the English. Others told of nearby tribes who could read English and dressed similarly to Europeans. Perhaps the most dramatic report from Jamestown was the sighting of a boy dressed as a native. He had blond hair and was fair-skinned.

These reports corroborate the most widely held theory of what became of the Roanoke colonists: They assimilated into some friendly Native American tribe. Over the course of generations, intermarriage between the natives and the English would produce a third, distinct group. This group may be the Lumbee tribe.

The Lumbee tribe is native to North Carolina, yet no certain lineage can be pinned down. The tribe's oral history links them to the Roanoke settlers, and this tradition is supported by some of their surnames and the tribe's ability to read and write English. Family names of some of the Roanoke colonists, like Dial, Hyatt and Taylor, were shared by Lumbee tribe members as early as 1719. The settlers who met them were astonished to find Native Americans that had grey eyes and spoke English. Even within the Lumbee tribe, the veracity of the group's link to the Roanoke colonists is in dispute. The **Lumbee Connection**, as it's come to be called, is intriguing.

But another explanation is that the Roanoke settlers fell victim to the Spanish, whose settlement was just down the coast in Florida. It's certain that the Spanish in the West Indies were aware of the English colonists' presence. One Roanoke settler named Darby Glanville left the 1587 expedition once it set ashore in Puerto Rico to take on supplies. He later reported that he told Spanish officials the location of the Roanoke settlement [source: Keiger].

In the opinion of Johns Hopkins University anthropologist Lee Miller, the colonists wandered into a violent shift in the balance of power among inland tribes. Natives with whom the colonists were friendly lost their hold over the area, and Native Americans hostile to the settlers took control. If the



Roanoke colonists made the trip inland when this happened, the men would've likely been killed and the women and children captured as slaves. The colonists would have then been traded along a route that spanned the U.S. coast from present-day Georgia to Virginia [source: Keiger]. All of these theories remain debated. But if the Lumbee Connection is true, then the Roanoke colonists aren't lost -- their genes can be found in people living today in Robeson County, North Carolina.

## DOCUMENT 5

# What Happened to the Lost Colony?

From <http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/workshops/legends/LClegends.html>

People have speculated about the fate of the colonists for more than four hundred years. What do you think happened to the Roanoke colony?

**Did They Move In with Manteo?** Governor John White believed that the colonists found refuge with the Croatoan people led by Manteo. His only evidence was CROATOAN carved on a post at the colony's deserted fort. Disaster struck White's relief voyage of 1590. Seven men drowned while attempting a landing. Then severe storms forced the remaining crew to seek safer seas.

Unable to interest backers in paying for another rescue attempt, White gave up the search. He wrote in 1593 that the relief of the colony was left "to the merciful help of the Almighty." He added, "I would to God my wealth were answerable to my will," so that he could pay for another voyage himself.

**Were They Murdered?** The colonists who settled at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607 sent expeditions to search for the Roanoke colonists. They gathered information from Native Americans they met. Powhatan, a powerful Indian leader in the Chesapeake Bay region, told Captain John Smith that he had killed the Roanoke colonists, who had been living with the Chesapeake Indians. Other reports suggested that a few English survived this attack and were living with other tribes. The last search parties, sent out in 1609–1612, learned nothing more about the colonists and presumed they had all perished.

**Did They Become the Hatteras Indians?** John Lawson, explorer, naturalist, and surveyor general of the Carolina colony, visited the abandoned fort site at Roanoke in the early 1700s. He found "a Brass-Gun, a Powder-Horn, and one small Quarter deck-Gun, made of Iron Staves, and hoop'd with the same Metal." Lawson also went to Hatteras Island, where he met Native Americans that he assumed were descendants of the lost colonists. He wrote: "These tell us, that several of their Ancestors were white People, and could talk in a Book [read], as we do; the Truth of which is confirm'd by gray Eyes being found frequently amongst these Indians, and no others. They value themselves extremely for their Affinity to the English, and are ready to do them all friendly Offices."

Lawson speculated that Indian "treachery," as well as a lack of supplies, doomed the colony. This treachery took the form of assimilation, "for we may reasonably suppose that the English were forced to cohabit with them, for Relief and Conversation; and that in process of Time, they conform'd themselves to the Manners of their Indian Relations. And thus we see, how apt Humane Nature is to degenerate."

**Did They Starve to Death?** In 1857 historian Francis Lister Hawks criticized the early colonists for failings of ambition and character but concluded that "we are inclined to think that these causes would not have prevented the successful establishment of White's colony, had it not been subjected to the horrors of famine. Time and experience would probably have corrected the evils we have named; but for starvation there was no remedy."

**Are Their Descendants Lumbee Indians?** Oral tradition among the Lumbees maintains that the colonists intermarried with local Indians and migrated southwest to what is now Robeson County.

Hamilton MacMillan, a Robeson County resident, published this theory and gathered evidence supporting it in the 1880s. He noted shared surnames among the lists of colonists and Robeson County Indian families. He also detailed local pronunciations and vocabulary that hearkened back to Elizabethan English.

**Did the Spanish Attack and Capture Them?** Writer Robert E. Betts suggested in the 1930s that Spanish soldiers destroyed the colony. "It is possible, judging by the relations between Spain and England at that time, that the colonists were removed to Spain, tried, jailed, or put to death. Again, it may be that the Spaniards incited the Indians to slay the English." Spain wanted to maintain control of the land and riches of the Western Hemisphere.

**Did They Drown at Sea?** Historians Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome wrote in their 1954 book *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State*: "One of the most plausible theories . . . is that the group, finally despairing of relief, sailed for England in a boat which had been left with them by White in 1587, and were lost in the Atlantic." The colonists had a small ship, called a pinnace, left for them to use after John White sailed back to England.

**Did They Split Up?** Historians Christopher Crittenden, William S. Powell, and David Beers Quinn in 1959 developed a theory based on the scanty evidence. They suggested that some or all of the colonists moved to Croatoan. At least some of them went on to the Chowan River area or the south side of the Chesapeake Bay. In addition, some may have traveled south toward Robeson County.

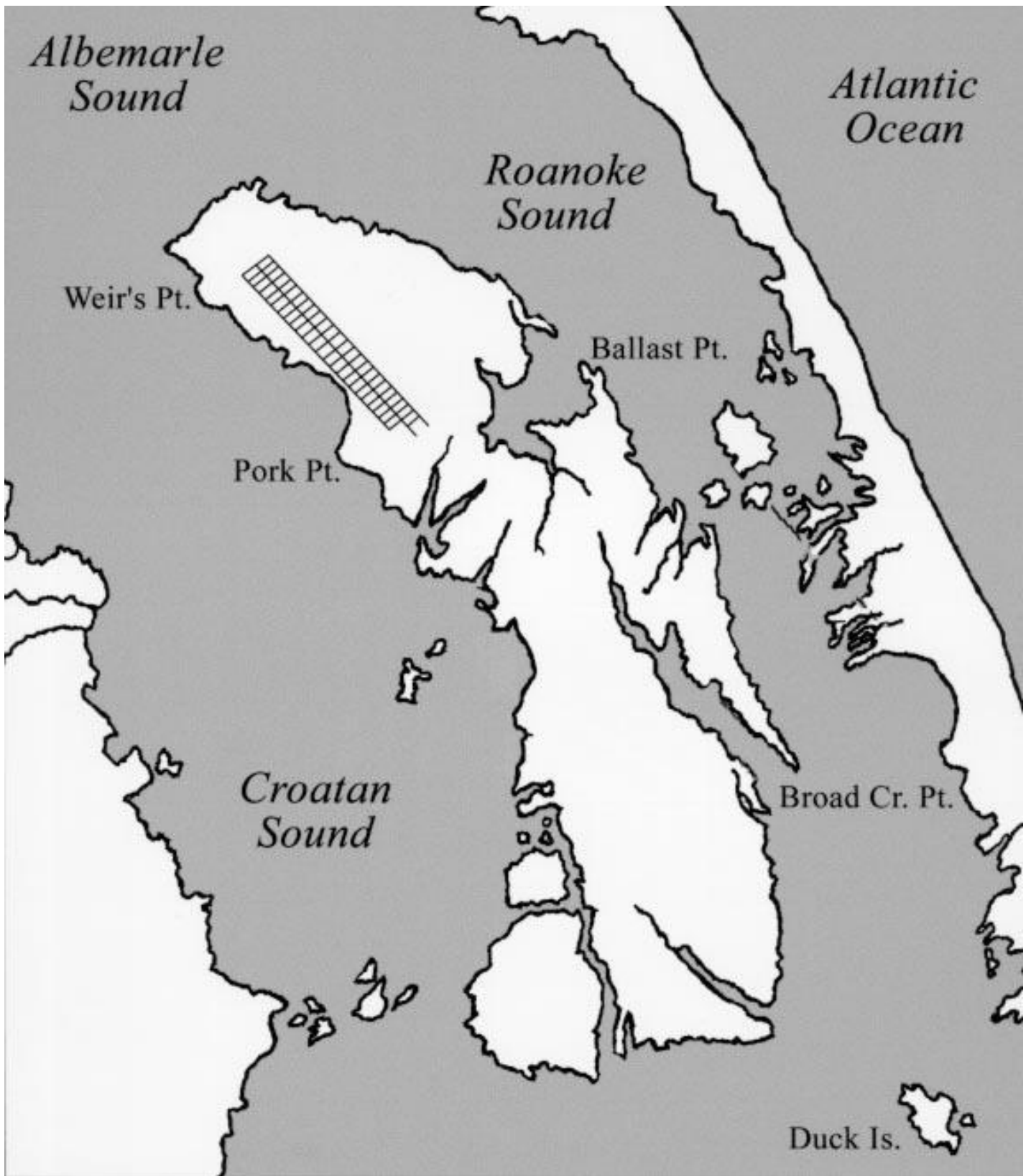
Powhatan probably did kill many of the colonists, particularly the men. Native Americans often spared the lives of women and children, incorporating them into their communities. Most probably some colonists remained alive—but unfound—when the English settled Jamestown in 1607.

**Is Virginia Dare Pocahontas? Her Sister? Her Mother?** In 1906 Frances Elizabeth Scott Bagby suggested in *Southern Magazine* that Powhatan's forces murdered the colonists but spared the life of Virginia Dare. Powhatan then adopted her as his daughter. Later newspaper accounts echoed this theory.

Other researchers claim that some Roanoke islanders believe that Powhatan spared the life of Virginia's mother, Elenor Dare, and married her. Their daughter, Virginia's half sister, was Pocahontas.

Mary Virginia Wall suggested in her 1908 novel *The Daughter of Virginia Dare* that Powhatan captured and married Virginia Dare herself. She gave birth to Pocahontas and soon died.

DOCUMENT 6



DOCUMENT 7

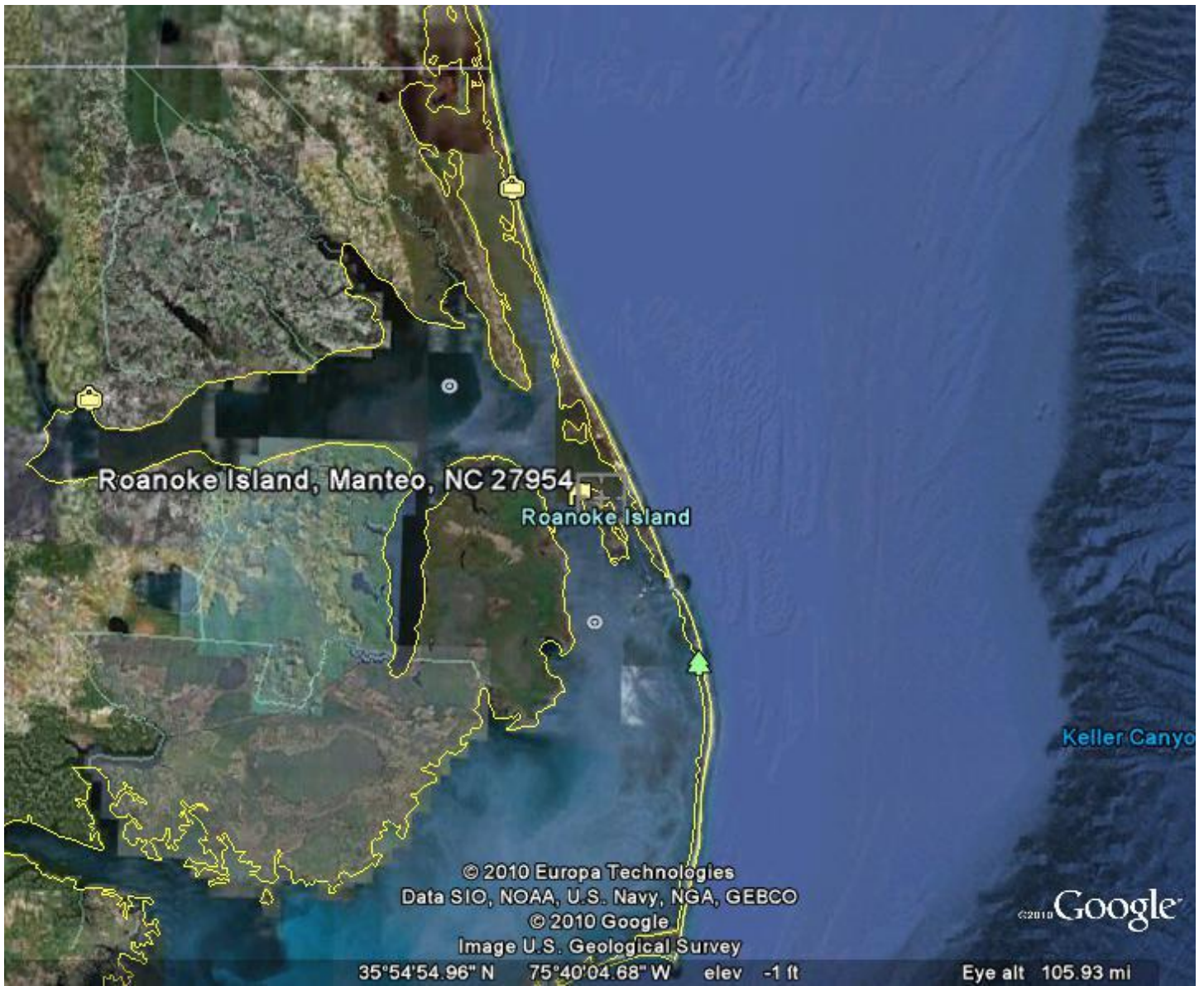




DOCUMENT 8



DOCUMENT 9





**DOCUMENT 10**

**Sir Walter Raleigh**



**John White**

