



Stories from an Island

Roanoke Island has been the scene of historical dramas spanning over three centuries. Algonquians, European settlers, Civil War soldiers, and African Americans have played their parts. Between 1584 and 1587 England took its first steps toward settling North America, making three voyages of exploration and settlement to this island. During the Civil War, Roanoke Island was occupied by Union troops and hosted a settlement that prepared ex-slaves for a new life after the war. Radio pioneer Reginald Fessenden transmitted the human voice using wireless technology on Roanoke Island in 1902. Fort Raleigh National Historic Site preserves sites and commemorates the stories connected with these events.



Soldier, explorer, poet, courtier, Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618) was the force behind the Roanoke Island voyages, although he never set foot in North America himself. He won over investors and staked his own fortune on the venture. Right: Elizabethan-era English coins from the park collection.

RALEIGH PORTRAIT: THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NEW YORK; COINS AND COVER PHOTO: NPS



John White's watercolors are considered the most informative illustrations of Algonquian culture. The fishing methods he illustrated are still used on Roanoke Sound today (see photo above).

White painted a remarkably accurate map (detail right) of the Outer Banks in 1585.

Copper plates (below) were among some 200 English and Indian artifacts of the late 1500s unearthed in a 2008 archeological dig. They may have formed a necklace worn by an Algonquian.



North shore of Roanoke Island (the area shown in photo above), location of Fort Raleigh National Historic Site

The Roanoke Voyages

1584: Reconnaissance

Armed with a charter from Queen Elizabeth, Sir Walter Raleigh sponsored England's first sustained exploration and settlement of the coast of North America. His venture was to find a suitable place for settlement and to counter Spanish domination in the New World. In July, Raleigh's two vessels arrived off the North Carolina coast, where captains Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe soon established relations with the Algonquians on Roanoke Island. The natives made the English feel welcome, trading and dining with them and teaching them much about these lands and other tribes in the area. After several weeks the English departed, taking with them two Algonquians, Manteo and Wanchese.

Barlowe's report to Raleigh portrayed the New World in the best light. While there was indeed much to praise, he wrote glowingly of "kind and loving" natives and their benign environment, creating false expectations about the virtues of the land and the readiness of its natives to accommodate newcomers.

Marsh pink (Sabatia)
by John White.

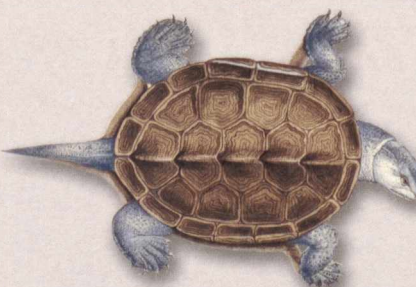


1585: Military Outpost

In the spring, Raleigh dispatched seven ships carrying some 600 people to Roanoke Island, the land he had named "Virginia." This company, commanded by Sir Richard Grenville, hoped to occupy land for England, find precious metals, and establish a base from which to raid Spanish ships. After his soldiers helped build an earthen fort, Grenville departed for England, leaving Ralph Lane in command of 107 soldiers and colonists. The expedition's highlights included exploration of the region's lands and waters and the work of artist John White and scientist-ethnographer Thomas Hariot. Their documentation of the Algonquians provided Europe its first view of this native culture. Otherwise, things did not go well. The colonists increasingly depended on the Indians for food. Indians began to die from European diseases. Suspecting a conspiracy, Lane killed Chief Wingina.

So, when Grenville failed to return with supplies by the expected time and Sir Francis Drake's raiding fleet stopped near Roanoke Island, the colonists accepted Drake's offer to take them home. When Grenville later arrived to find the colonists gone, he left 15 men to maintain England's tenuous foothold in America.

Diamond-back terrapin
by John White.
JOHN WHITE IMAGES: THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NEW YORK



1587: Cittie of Raleigh

The goal of the next voyage was a true colony, with women and children among the settlers. This "Cittie of Raleigh," led by John White, was planned to be on the Chesapeake Bay. In July, after the 117 colonists stopped at Roanoke Island on a futile search for the 15 men left behind, White's pilot refused to take them any farther. Their only course was to repair the fort and dwellings left by the 1585 colonists. Troubles quickly mounted. Remembering their earlier treatment, some Indians were hostile and killed a colonist while he was crabbing. The colonists then attacked a nearby Indian village, killing a villager before realizing it was a friendly group.

With the situation deteriorating and food low, White returned to England for relief. The colonists promised that if they left Roanoke Island while he was away, they would carve their destination in a tree. Thwarted by captains more bent on raiding than rescue, then by the need for every ship to fight the Spanish Armada, White did not return until 1590. The settlement was silent—with only the letters CROATOAN carved into a post. When White tried to reach Croatoan Island (see map), a hurricane forced the ships' return to England. The fate of the colonists remains a mystery.

Elenora . . . wife to Ananias Dare . . . was delivered of a daughter in Roanoak . . . and because this childe was the first Christian borne in Virginia, she was named Virginia.

—From the narratives of Gov. John White on the birth of his granddaughter, Aug. 18, 1587

The Roanoke Islanders



Reconstructed Earthen Fort
NPS



2008 archeological dig
NPS



Algonquians portrayed in *The Lost Colony*
© WILLIAM REY LONG STUDIOS



Freedmen's Colony cabin
NORTH CAROLINA STATE ARCHIVES



Fessenden radio tower
OUTER BANKS HISTORY CENTER

Unearthing the First Roanoke Story

... the fortune of excavation [is] of all pursuits of chance the most baffling and the most absorbing ...

—Archeologist Talcott Williams, 1895

Most of what we know of the events on Roanoke Island during the late 1500s comes from reports, letters, and journals. A key to learning more is through **archeology**, the discovery and analysis of physical evidence—objects and structures. For over a century, archeologists have been surveying and excavating the site to shed more light on the Roanoke settlements. Evidence of an **Earthen Fort**, built by the 1585 or 1587 colonists, and artifacts found nearby are currently our most tangible evidence of the colony.

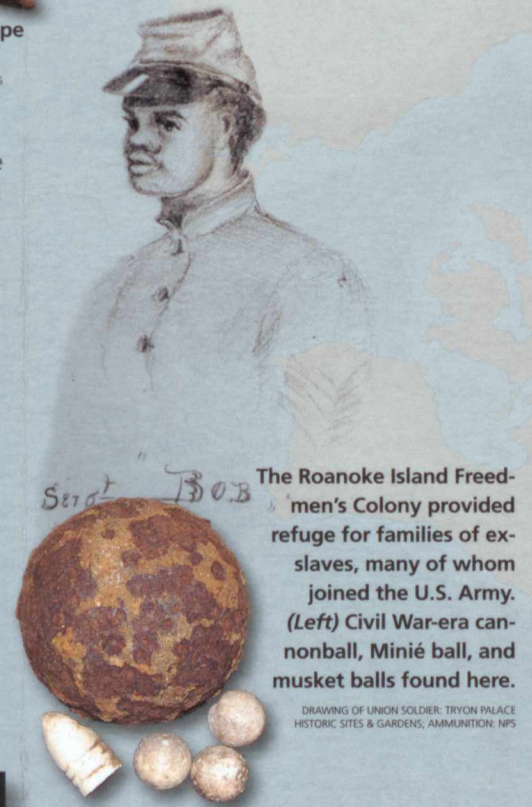
A dig in 1895 by Talcott Williams revealed the rough dimensions of the fort's ditches. Jean C. Harrington excavated the fort site in 1947, confirming its method of construction: earth removed from the defensive ditches was thrown inward to form the fort's walls. The excavations also uncovered an iron sickle, part of a Spanish olive jar, and casting counters used in commercial transactions. In 1950, the National Park Service reconstructed the fort, piling earth removed from the defensive ditch into walls based on those of other forts of the period.

A 1991 dig, using remote sensing technology, revealed what archeologists called a "**science center**." Pieces of crucibles, once-molten materials, and charcoal pointed to the metallurgy experiments performed here by Thomas Hariot and Joachim Ganz. Ganz was a Prague "mineral

man" who accompanied the colonists to assess the quality and quantity of discovered ores. Some historians believe that the earthen fort, too small to have been the settlement's main defensive structure, was built to defend the science center.

A 2006 ground-penetrating radar survey revealed patterns that prompted further examination. Researchers then used radar tomography to get three-dimensional images. Excavations in 2008 turned up over 200 artifacts from the late 1500s, including English and Algonquian potsherds, European glass beads, and an Algonquian clay pipe stem (above) found near the decorative copper squares pictured on the other side of this brochure.

Algonquian tobacco pipe stem found in 2008
NPS



The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony provided refuge for families of ex-slaves, many of whom joined the U.S. Army. (Left) Civil War-era cannonball, Minié ball, and musket balls found here.

DRAWING OF UNION SOLDIER: TRYON PALACE HISTORIC SITES & GARDENS, AMMUNITION: NPS

Those Who Came Later ...

Seeking Refuge

During the **Civil War**, Union forces opened their 1862 campaign to blockade southern ports by taking Roanoke Island, flanked by important waterways. In February 1862, Brig. Gen. Ambrose Burnside landed 13,000 troops on the island, overwhelming its Confederate forts and defenders.

Word spread among runaway slaves that on "Roanoke Island, you will find safe haven." With hundreds of refugees pouring in, the army established a **Freedmen's Colony** headed by army chaplain Horace James. To prepare the liberated slaves for life after the war, James laid out one-acre lots and recruited missionaries as teachers. By 1865 almost 3,500 freedmen lived in 560 log dwellings they had built, along with a hospital, church, schools, and a sawmill. The colony was decommissioned in 1867.

Advancing Science

Radio pioneer **Reginald Fessenden** came to Roanoke Island in 1901 to further his work on a wireless system for transmitting weather information. He erected 50-foot radio towers on Cape Hatteras and the north end of Roanoke Island. At the same time that the Wright brothers were testing their gliders seven miles away across Roanoke Sound, Fessenden lived in Manteo for a year and a half, traveling each morning to Weir Point and working to refine his radio signals.

In April 1902, Fessenden wrote: "The new receiver is a wonder!" He had succeeded in sending and receiving quality voice radio transmissions—a crucial step in regulating electromagnetic signals called amplitude modulation (AM), which enabled clear voice transmissions over the airwaves.

Getting Around the Park



About Your Visit

The visitor center is open seven days a week, year-round except December 25. The park grounds are open sunup to sundown. In summer the grounds are open in the evening until the performance of *The Lost Colony* is completed. Wayside exhibits on the **Civil War Battle of Roanoke Island** and the **Freedmen's Colony** are in the plaza just outside the visitor center. You can also visit the **Reconstructed Earthen Fort**, walk the short **Thomas Hariot**

Nature Trail out to Albemarle Sound, or hike the 2.5-mile (round-trip) **Freedom Trail** to a fine view of Croatan Sound. The trail starts near **The Elizabethan Gardens**, which are set on 10 acres next to the park but outside its boundary. Operated by the Garden Clubs of North Carolina, Inc., these gardens memorialize the colonists of the Roanoke Voyages through formal arrangements of statuary, quiet paths, and flora.

During summer, the 1587 colonists' story is dramatized through an outdoor symphonic play, *The Lost Colony*, at the Waterside Theatre in the park. The performance is managed by the Roanoke Island Historical Association.

In the nearby Town of Manteo is **Roanoke Island Festival Park**, a North Carolina Historic Site. This park provides a comprehensive look at

Roanoke Island history and displays the reproduction *Elizabeth II* sailing vessel. The nearby **North Carolina Aquarium** is also a popular destination.

Fort Raleigh National Historic Site is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.



For Your Safety

Every effort has been made to provide for your safety, but there are still hazards requiring alertness. Use common sense and caution.

Regulations

Visit the park website or check at the visitor center for information on regulations, including firearms possession.

Accessibility

The visitor center and restrooms are wheelchair-accessible. Service animals are welcome.

More Information

Fort Raleigh
National Historic Site
1401 National Park Drive
Manteo, NC 27954
252-473-5772
www.nps.gov/fora

NPS-2010-357-948/0518
Printed on recycled paper.