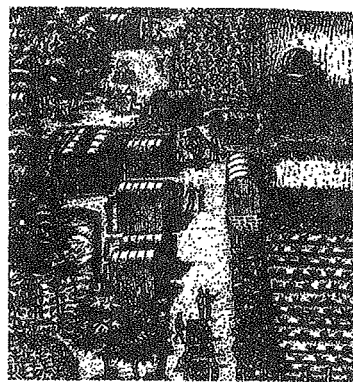


★ NONFICTION ★

The Lost Colony

In 1584 Sir Walter Raleigh, a favored adviser to Queen Elizabeth I, sent an expedition of explorers to America. He hoped they would find a suitable place where England could establish a colony. The men returned with glowing stories about Roanoke, a small island off the coast of our present-day state of North Carolina. They reported that the Native Americans who lived in the area were welcoming, fish were abundant, and the soil was so fruitful that the peas they had planted had grown 14 inches in just ten days.



Encouraged by this enthusiastic account, Raleigh recruited about a hundred men to colonize Roanoke Island. By August 1585 these men had crossed the Atlantic Ocean and were building houses and a fort on the island. At first everything went well, but then problems developed. Food became scarce, the promised British supply ships didn't arrive, and the relationship between the colonists and the Native Americans soured. In June 1586 Sir Francis Drake anchored near the island on his way home from the West Indies. Fed up with life in the New World, the colonists sailed back to England with Drake on his ships.

Unwilling to give up, Raleigh made arrangements for another colonizing attempt. This time he included families. They would be more likely, he reasoned, to develop the colony into a permanent settlement. Raleigh chose John White, a member of the first colony, to be the governor. To all who were willing to join the expedition, he offered 500 acres of land.

In July 1587 about 115 men, women, and children arrived on Roanoke. Included in the group were White's pregnant daughter, Eleanor Dare, and her husband, Ananias. The colonists found that the original settlers' fort had been razed and the houses had become overgrown with vines. Under White's direction, the settlement was soon rebuilt. There, on August 18, 1587, Eleanor Dare gave birth to a daughter, Virginia, the first English child born in the "New World." Later that month, White sailed back to England to get needed supplies.

A war between England and Spain prevented White from returning to Roanoke until August 1590. When he finally reached the island, however, he found that all the houses had been removed and the settlement had been abandoned. The only clues to the colonists' whereabouts were the letters CRO carved on one tree and the word CROATOAN carved on another. Croatoan, an island south of Roanoke, was where the Croatoan Indians lived. The next day White tried to sail to this island, but fierce storms and rough seas made landing there impossible. White had no choice but to return to England.

In the years that followed, several attempts were made to find the colonists. None were successful. The fate of the lost colonists remains an unsolved mystery.