

## Weekly Reading # 3

Most Americans know the story of the “Lost Colony”. It dates back to the time the Europeans began to settle on this free land, that is now known as Virginia. The village of Roanoke was the one of the first English colonies to be established on the soil. However this village did not turn out to be that of a successful one. The Governor of this hamlet had the name of John White. The small population of Roanoke complained about their lack of food and tools. They also contained frightening suspicions that the Natives may launch a surprise attack on them. These complaints eventuated in John White going to England to later return along with the proper supplies the colonists requested. John White returned three long years afterwards. But what he returned to was not that of a colony but of a ghost town. The area which was once a village was stripped of its people. Houses and other shelters were nowhere in site. What was left behind were some small cannons, an opened chest, a tall fence built around the perimeter of the former village site, and a single word inscription carved on a fence post, “Croatoan”.

### Five Popular Theories:

1. The people of Roanoke simply left the settlement.

This is one of the more probable theories. It is said that they have supposedly left Roanoke island and started settling in the Chesapeake Bay. And that they built rafts or a boat of some sort using materials torn apart from their houses. Close to twenty years had passed before John Smith and his group started the well-known settlement of Jamestown (where the popular story of Pocahontas takes place). This settlement was near the Chesapeake Bay. The evidence in this tale is that the ruler of the natives did indeed admit to killing the colonists. They said that they had been in their land (Chesapeake Bay area) and were then annihilated to prevent more English settlers from stealing their land.

2. The whole population of Roanoke Island was killed by a disease.

This is an absurd theory. It is true that the English had brought over some diseases. However, note, there were no bodies found and the houses had disappeared. Quite a ridiculous theory.

3. The village was destroyed by a severe storm such as a hurricane.

Another one of the incredulous theories. A hurricane could have washed away the colonists and destroyed the houses, true. But the huge problem with this theory is the fence was still standing. It is not possible for a storm to do as much damage as clearing away the whole settlement when the fence remained untouched.

4. The people of Roanoke decided to leave Roanoke Island to live with the Natives. This theory is definitely probable. Crotoan, which was carved on the post, was the name of an island in the area. It was also the name of the group of the kind natives

that inhabited it. It is possible that they colonists decided to live with the natives of Croatoan. Though there has not been a descent amount of evidence to prove this theory, there also has been no evidence against it.

#### **5. The colonists were killed by the Native Americans**

This is the most probable of all five theories. One important fact supports this theory. As one may not know, the English men had before tried to start the colony of Roanoke before. Twas a group of fifteen men. A little over a year had passed since they first started the colony, before explorers decided to check up on their hopeful progress. What these explorers found was one dead body. It was verified that it was the work of the Natives. From this past event we know that the Natives were capable of such atrocities and also capable of hiding the bodies. What's interesting is that the Natives pulled all of that off in between less than a two year period. While the "lost colony" had been deprived of its leader for a number of three years. The "Indians" had a sufficient amount of time to tear down the buildings too. However there has still not been enough evidence to verify this theory.

It is an incredible fact that hitherto historians contain no sure explanation about what exactly happened to the colonists and the residences of Roanoke in 1588. People have umpteen theories on what occurred in that three year period. Some, as we know, include, the spread of a disease, a hurricane, etc. Even peculiar yet probable theories such as extra-terrestrial abductions have been issued. Will mankind perpetually crawl in the dark when it comes to this topic? Or, will light be discovered?

## Captain John Smith



*This portrait of Captain John Smith appeared on a 1616 map of New England. The image was colorized by Jamestown Rediscovery senior staff archaeologist Jamie May from an original engraving by Simon de Passe.*

Virginians know that Captain John Smith was one of the first American heroes. But because he was a proud and boastful man, it is difficult to know which parts of his life, as recorded in the written record, are fact and which are fiction. What many people may not know is that Smith's adventures started even before Jamestown.

Born in 1580 in Willoughby, England, John Smith left home at age 16 after his father died. He began his travels by joining volunteers in France who were fighting for Dutch independence from Spain. Two years later, he set off for the Mediterranean Sea, working on a merchant ship. In 1600 he joined Austrian forces to fight the Turks in the "Long War." A valiant soldier, he was promoted to Captain while fighting in Hungary. He was fighting in Transylvania two years later in 1602. There he was wounded in battle, captured, and sold as a slave to a Turk. This Turk then sent Smith as a gift to his sweetheart in Istanbul. According to Smith, this girl fell in love with him and sent him to her brother to get training for Turkish imperial service. Smith reportedly escaped by murdering the brother and returned to Transylvania by fleeing through Russia and Poland. After being released from service and receiving a large reward, he traveled all through Europe and Northern Africa. He returned to England in the winter of 1604-05.

Here begins Captain John Smith's American adventures. Apparently restless in England, Smith became actively involved with plans by the Virginia Company to colonize Virginia for profit, as had been granted by a charter from King James I. After setting sail on December 20, 1606, this famous expedition finally reached Virginia in April 1607 after enduring a lengthy voyage of over four months in three tiny ships. When the sealed box that listed the names of the seven council members who were to govern the colony was opened, Smith's name was on the list. On May 13, 1607 the settlers landed at Jamestown ready to begin the task of surviving in a new environment.

The harsh winter, lack of fresh water, and the spread of disease made life in Jamestown difficult for the settlers. Attacks by the native Algonquian Indians made life almost impossible. The Indians, hoping that the settlers would give up and leave, raided their camps, stealing pistols, gunpowder, and other necessary supplies. John Smith became leader of the colonists and did his best to fight off the Indians.

In December 1607, he and some companions were ambushed by Indian deer hunters. After killing the other Englishmen with him, the Indians carried Smith back to their powerful chief, Powhatan, to decide his fate. Powhatan was apparently greatly impressed by Smith's self-confidence as well as such mystical instruments as an ivory and glass pocket compass he carried with him. Smith was questioned about his colony and then made to take part in some sort of ritual or trial, after which, in keeping with an Indian custom, he was made a subordinate chief in the tribe. Powhatan's 11 year old daughter, Pocahontas, took part in the ceremony in some way. Smith was constantly unsure of his fate, and he was convinced afterward that Pocahontas had saved his life. Smith was released in friendship after about four weeks of captivity and returned to Jamestown, guided by Indians. Meanwhile, dissent within the colony fermented due to laziness, lack of supplies, and periodic attempts at desertion by many of the colonists. Personal conflicts among Smith and various leaders, as well as disagreements over new policies being formulated in London, added to the discontent. As a result, Smith left Jamestown to explore and map the Chesapeake Bay region and search for badly needed food supplies. Due to bad government and near chaos, Smith was eventually elected president of the local council in September 1608. He instituted a policy of rigid discipline, strengthened defenses, and he encouraged farming with this admonishment: "He who does not work, will not eat." Because of his strong leadership, the settlement survived and grew during the next year. Unfortunately, Smith was accidentally injured by a gunpowder burn and had to return to England for treatment in October 1609, never to return to Virginia.

In London he actively promoted the further colonization of Virginia, but was unpopular with the Virginia Company. In April 1614, he returned to the New World in a successful voyage to the Maine and Massachusetts Bay areas, which he named New England, with the approval of Prince Charles. He was denied further opportunities to return to America due to his independent nature and spent the rest of his life writing his memoirs and advice until his death in 1631 at age 51.

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