



The English Newcomers

A group of strangers from across the Atlantic Ocean to the east entered this world in 1607. They came from England, a country ruled by a king whose power was tempered by Parliament. These newcomers represented a private stock company, the Virginia Company of London, whose objective was to establish a colony in the Chesapeake Bay region and exploit the resources there for the benefit of the investors.

On April 26, 1607, (by the calendar then in use, ten days behind our calendar), three ships sailed into Chesapeake Bay. Named *Susan Constant*, *Godspeed*, and *Discovery*, the vessels carried 144 English men and boys including ships' crews. A landing party came ashore at Point Comfort, rejoiced at touching land after four unpleasant months aboard ship, and reconnoitered the nearby terrain. As the party returned near nightfall, Native inhabitants attacked and wounded two Englishmen. The others opened fire with muskets and the attackers vanished. This was the first contact between the newcomers and the people of Tsenacomoco.

Earlier European Explorers

It was not, however, the first experience that the Powhatan had had with Europeans. Indeed, the history of those encounters was lengthy and often bloody. Perhaps as early as 1524, Spaniards may have visited the Chesapeake Bay. Soon thereafter, European explorations of the Eastern Seaboard became more frequent. About 1561, the Spaniards came and sailed away with a young Virginia Indian named Paquinquino, whom they baptized and renamed Don Luis. After a decade of life among the Spanish, Don Luis returned to America and helped establish a Jesuit mission on the York River in September 1570. Quickly, however, Don Luis returned to his people and became Paquinquino once more. In February 1571, he helped them wipe out the mission except for one young survivor who was left alive to report what had happened. A Spanish force arrived the next year and retaliated against the people for the loss of the missionaries. In 1584–1585, Englishmen established a settlement at Roanoke Island, in present-day North Carolina, and the next winter explored the Chesapeake Bay. They abandoned Roanoke Island in 1586–1587, then returned later in 1587 to create another settlement there—the so-called “Lost Colony”—and conflicts with the local people followed. The Spanish came back to explore the Bay in 1588, English mariners followed suit about 1603, and there were doubtless other, unrecorded explorations.

Why the Interest in Exploration?

What drove these nations—as well as the Portuguese and the Dutch—to explore and settle the land west of Europe? In part it was a quest for a quicker and easier route to the riches of the Orient than was available overland from west to east, in part it was a desire to dominate the seas and protect their own trade routes and raid those of other nations, and in part it was a wish to increase national power on the world stage. This last was especially true of the English, and writers such as Richard Hakluyt and others pressed the adventurous among them to advance England's march toward empire and spread the Protestant Christian Gospel to the American Indians. There was also the desire to deny territory in the New World to other nations. Personal ambition and the hope of glory and wealth inspired many individual adventurers.

England's late entrance into the colonization race got off to a poor start. Some other nations, such as Spain and France, focused initially on exploration and the establishment of trading posts. England concentrated on using private investment to create colonies, but the first attempts in Newfoundland and Maine as well as on Roanoke Island ended badly. The English consistently underestimated the ability of the Native peoples to control their own country.

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