



The Granger Collection, New York

# Setting SAIL

Sir Walter Raleigh tried without luck to establish an English colony in the New World.

**Plundered** means robbed of goods by force.

**Privateers** are commanders of ships that are privately manned and owned but authorized by a government to attack and capture enemy vessels.

## FAST FACT

QUEEN ELIZABETH I WAS KNOWN AS THE VIRGIN QUEEN BECAUSE SHE NEVER MARRIED.

Sir Walter Raleigh, military adventurer and friend of England’s Queen Elizabeth I, watched as the crowds cheered for Sir Francis Drake in 1580. Drake was the first Englishman to sail around the world. His ship, the *Golden Hind*, had returned filled with the silver and gold he had **plundered** from Spanish ships and settlements.

At the time, Spain and Portugal were the most powerful nations in the western world. Their warships ruled the seas, protected their Central and South American colonies, and battled British **privateers** such as Drake.

But Raleigh knew that if England wanted to become a world power, it needed more than Spanish metals and jewels — England needed colonies of its own. Colonies could produce goods and offer safe harbors for British ships, not to mention riches for those who established settlements.

### The First English Colony

The first colonizing attempt by the English in 1583 ended with ships wrecked in the stormy North Atlantic

Ocean. The following year, Raleigh sent two ships from England that landed on an island off the coast of present-day North Carolina. The native people there seemed friendly, and they had furs, skins, dyes, timber, and freshwater pearls to trade. Raleigh named the new land “Virginia” in honor of England’s “Virgin Queen.” This new colony was much larger than the present-day state of Virginia.

Within another year, seven more ships, led by Raleigh’s cousin Sir Richard Grenville, sailed from England for Virginia. Most of these colonists were soldiers and craftsmen. A scientist, Thomas Hariot (also spelled Harriot), and a mapmaker and artist, John White, also sailed.



The Granger Collection, New York

**John White, who later became governor of the ill-fated English colony on Roanoke Island, drew this map of Virginia in about 1585.**

Near land, one of the seven vessels struck a sandbar and nearly sank, losing the colonists' supply of winter food. Once on land, when an Indian stole a silver cup from the colonists, Grenville retaliated by burning down an entire Indian village. With little food and having made enemies of the native people, the colonists moved to Roanoke Island, where they could protect themselves better. Grenville sailed for England to fetch more supplies.

### From New Discoveries to Harsh Realities

While the colonists waited for Grenville's return, Hariot collected plant and animal specimens, and White sketched scenes of their new environment. Together, they mapped the area. By winter, though, the colonists were hungry. When the Indians lost interest in trading food for goods, the soldiers began making demands, which turned into threats.

By June 1586, the starving men were at war with the Indians. They were saved by the sudden appearance of Drake. They sailed back to England with him, leaving no one to greet the puzzled Grenville when he returned to Virginia in August. Grenville left 15 of his men to "hold" the colony, and he, too, went back home to England.

Disappointed, Raleigh tried again the next year. In July 1587, three ships carrying about 115 craftsmen and farmers landed on Roanoke Island. They found only one skeleton from the 15 men left by Grenville. And unfortunately, the new arrivals did not fare much better. Their pilot, who may have been working for the Spanish, abandoned the colonists. Within six months, nearly a third of those Englishmen were dead.

White also was a member of this group. Named governor by the surviving colonists, White was chosen to go in the remaining ship to obtain help. Because White had a daughter

and granddaughter at the colony, the settlers knew he would return as quickly as possible. But back in England, White found that the country was preparing for war with Spain and unable to spare ships.

### A Mysterious Demise

Three years passed before the despairing White could return to Roanoke Island, and when he did, the colonists had vanished. The only evidence to indicate where they might have gone was the word “Croatoan” carved on a gatepost. But before White could sail to this nearby island inhabited by friendly Indians, a storm forced his ships far off the coast. His captain insisted on



“... and no one from the ‘lost colony’ ever was seen again.”

returning to England, and no one from the “lost colony” ever was seen again.

When Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, James VI of Scotland succeeded her as King James I of England.

Soon after, he accused Raleigh of **treason**, for which Raleigh eventually was beheaded.

Although Virginia did not provide him with a fortune, Raleigh is remembered as the man who first settled North America for England. And

the next attempt to colonize the New World by the English would be a success. Named for the new king, it was called Jamestown.

A **pilot** means one who does not belong to a ship's company but who is licensed to conduct a ship into and out of port.  
**Treason** is the violation of allegiance toward one's country.

**FAST FACT**  
JOHN WHITE'S DAUGHTER, ELEANOR DARE, GAVE BIRTH TO A BABY NAMED VIRGINIA SHORTLY BEFORE HE LEFT ROANOKE ISLAND. VIRGINIA WAS THE FIRST ENGLISH CHILD BORN IN AMERICA.

When rescuers returned to Roanoke Island, the settlers there had vanished, leaving only a single clue to their whereabouts: the word **Croatoan**, the name of a nearby island.



North Wind Picture Archives