

North America before Jamestown

Colonizing North America was a risky business. Most of the early expeditions consisted of soldiers who fought with the natives and did not know how to farm. Lured by the promise of new land and possible treasure, however, European adventurers never stopped trying.

When Captain John Smith landed at Jamestown on June 14, 1607, Spain, France, and England had already attempted to place fourteen colonies in North America. Most of these enterprises ended in disaster, but two Spanish colonies survived. Thus, Jamestown was not the first, but only the third successful European colony in North America.

Little is known of Spain's first colony in 1526 at St. Miguel de Guadalupe except that it was somewhere on the South Carolina or Georgia coast. Disease and starvation killed four hundred fifty people before the survivors returned to Cuba. These Spaniards probably brought the first African slaves to North America. Spanish soldiers landed near Tampa Bay, Florida, in 1528; only three out of six hundred of these adventurers lived to return to Mexico. The Spanish failed again at Pensacola, Florida, when a hurricane destroyed the colony in 1599.

Trappers had spent winters in Canada for years before France sent four hundred settlers to Cap-Rouge in 1541. Conflicts with American Indians and disease ended this effort in a year. The French also encountered problems with Indians at Parris Island, South Carolina, in 1562. Nevertheless, they built Fort Caroline near Jacksonville, Florida, in 1564.



Fort Caroline

Fort Caroline failed for different reasons; Spain destroyed this French colony. Spanish soldiers had landed at St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565, and established the first permanent European settlement in North America. Spain's government intended to keep the French from building a base to raid Spanish ships, so Spanish soldiers quickly attacked and destroyed Fort Caroline.

Success at St. Augustine did not help colonies elsewhere. American Indian attacks destroyed Spanish colonies in North Carolina (1567) and Virginia (1570).

The French failed in Nova Scotia (1598), Quebec (1599), and Maine (1604). In 1598 Spain finally established a second, successful colony, far inland near Espanol, New Mexico.

England tried to place a colony on Roanoke Island, North Carolina, in 1585. Nearly two hundred people landed, and Virginia Dare was born on August 18, 1587. She was the first English child born in the New World. Unfortunately, the colonists quarreled with the Indians; and supplies for the struggling colony were erratic. They arrived late or not at all. Returning to the colony in 1590, English sailors discovered Roanoke had been abandoned and the houses dismantled. They found the mysterious word “Croatoan” carved on a post. It is believed that surviving colonists, facing starvation, may have joined local tribes. Even this tragedy did not keep Europeans from trying to establish colonies in the New World. Eventually, through hard work, suffering, and perseverance, Europeans would establish colonies in North America.



Name: _____

Date: _____

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Discussion Questions:

1. What was the name of Spain's first colony in North America?
2. What were some of the problems the first settlers in America encountered?
3. What was the name of the first permanent European settlement in North America?
4. Who was the first English child born in the New World?
5. What did the English settlers find when they returned to Roanoke in 1590?