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Prologue

Jamestown, Blacksburg, and the Return of Pangaea

This book was written in Blacksburg, Virginia, west of the Blue Ridge. Early settlers had reason to view the area as a very Garden of Eden. True, the fruit might not just fall from the trees without human effort, and winters brought at least one week of bitter cold. But the growing season was generous, the water good, the wood supply ample, and land along the creeks plentiful. Bears and deer provided hides for humans to wear and meat for them to eat. More than had the country nearer the Chesapeake Bay, the land seemed uninhabited, plentiful, beckoning people to come, and they came.

More than a place, Blacksburg—and Virginia—can stand as a symbol of the Pangaea of eons ago, when the continents of Europe, Africa, and the Americas all nestled together for a time before they drifted apart again. When they came together, Africa shoved a shoulder into the Chesapeake, and the resulting crunch pushed up a range of mountains we call the Appalachians. The continents drifted apart, but the mountains remained, a monument to the encounter. Over the many thousands of years between then and now, the mountains grew old and, as people often do, grew gentler, bowed, their rough edges smoothed, until settlers in the 1750s found rolling hills—as well as some that seemed less tamed—and waterways meandering among them.

Christopher Columbus led expeditions that took him from Spain to the Caribbean in the 1490s—300 years before the founding of Blacksburg in 1798—and initiated a process by which, through human activity, Pangaea came together again. The continents remained apart, but their peoples merged. People from Africa and Europe migrated in huge numbers across the Atlantic Ocean to what was for them, though hardly for the Native Americans they found living there,
a New World. Mixed in various proportions, the three great groups forged new communities. The region around Blacksburg came to be inhabited largely by people whose origins lay in Europe and the British Isles, but members of the other two groups also called the region home and shaped developments there.

Jamestown—far better known than Blacksburg, and having marked its 400th anniversary in the year 2007—dates its origins to 1607, nearly 200 years before Blacksburg acquired its name, but also more than 100 years after Columbus sailed into the Western Hemisphere. For generations before the founding of Jamestown, Europeans—especially the Spanish and the French—had been exploring and seeking to settle the New World, and England launched its first efforts to establish a colony a generation before the settling of Jamestown. The effort in the 1580s to found a community at Roanoke Island failed, and multiple times it later appeared as though the Jamestown adventure might fail as well, but it did not. From those various early efforts emerged a vast New World empire claimed by the British, contested by the French and the Spanish, and always controlled or shaped in part as well by the descendants of far-earlier inhabitants and claimants. Jamestown persisted, and English settlements spread.

I have sought to outline what I see as major themes of Virginia’s history across four centuries—from the 1580s to the present. As a historical entity, the place that carried the name “Virginia” must be defined in terms of space and time. Virginia simultaneously grew and shrank between the settling of Jamestown in 1607 and the establishment of Blacksburg in 1798. It grew in terms of colonized areas. In the east, settlement pushed westward up the rivers. In the west, it pushed south by southwest out of Pennsylvania, up the Shenandoah Valley, and on south, until it reached the Blacksburg area and beyond, into today’s far southwestern Virginia and, often, into Kentucky or Tennessee.

At the same time, Virginia shrank in terms of formal boundaries. During the early years after Jamestown’s settlement, “Virginia” lay along the Atlantic Ocean between New France to the north and Spanish Florida to the south, and it included an unimaginably vast area—seventeenth-century maps reveal just how unimaginably—that stretched west to the Pacific Ocean. The end of the French and Indian War in 1763 left Spain in control of the western half of the Mississippi River valley. Later, Virginia relinquished the Northwest Territory, as well as Kentucky, so by the 1790s, Ohio and Kentucky both lay outside its territory, and Virginia’s borders encompassed only today’s Virginia and West Virginia. The modern boundaries date from the 1860s.

Jamestown, and the lower James River, which flows into the Chesapeake Bay, can stand as a symbol of eastern Virginia and of the first permanent arrival of people from across the Atlantic into a new colony in America. By contrast, the
New River flows west into the Ohio River, so Blacksburg can represent not only Virginia’s western extension but also the movement of people both into Virginia west of the Blue Ridge and farther west into the Ohio River valley and beyond.

Long before the 1790s, the dominant language along most of the eastern seaboard of North America was English and the key social, economic, and political institutions were English ones. But the English colonies on the mainland—Virginia, to be sure, and others to both the north and the south of Virginia—grew in human population, in geographical expanse, and in economic power and developed in ways that increasingly distinguished them from England. Distinct or not, their inhabitants found themselves in the late 1770s struggling—successfully—for political independence from the mother country. Within two centuries of the founding of Jamestown, Virginians by the names of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson had taken office as the first and third presidents of a new nation, the United States of America.

Even then, the adventure of Virginia—and of America, and their connections with each other and with a much larger world—could be said to be just beginning. This book traces the stories of the people and events and developments that make up the history of Virginia, both at home and, often, in those larger contexts. It would not be reckless to say that much of modern human history—the era after the return of Pangaea—can be seen in microcosm in the history of Virginia. Yet Virginia has followed its own path through the centuries. This book tells that story.

Whereas many Virginians, like many historical accounts of the state, emphasize harmony among Virginians and relative changelessness across the years, I have tended to emphasize conflict among various groups of Virginians and have often stressed discontinuity. At one point or another, Virginians have differed over a wide range of issues, taking those differences seriously and expressing them with great feeling. I hope to show why, and how, and to what effect Virginians differed among each other. Moreover, Virginia has experienced great change, and I seek to help my readers understand the ways it changed from one era to another. In recounting Virginia’s history, I have emphasized black Virginians as well as white Virginians, and the west as well as the east.

In outlining the major developments and highlighting the leading issues of a given time, I have tended to stress three major themes. One is power and policy: who had political power, what they tried to do with it, and how it sometimes shifted from one group to another. Another is education, higher and elementary alike, not only as far as institutions go, but also in a larger sense: what people learned, what they valued, and what culture they sought to transmit from one generation to another. The third is race: how racial identity has operated...
at different times and over a collection of issues. At various points, these three themes—political power, racial identity, and public education—have powerfully come together, as in Massive Resistance, when the General Assembly directed the governor to close public schools rather than permit them to be desegregated.

I have also addressed what I call “multiple pasts”: The past we see can vary, or change, depending on our perspective, the questions we ask, and the sources we use. From time to time, I supply material for readers to consider how we come to understand the past, and how that can differ among us and change over time.

The title of this book is itself an argument—or rather, it is an argument on the one hand and a question on the other. Especially in the nineteenth century, proponents of a very different view than that of Virginia as the “cradle of America” argued for the primacy of Massachusetts Bay over Chesapeake Bay in the founding of what became the United States of America. If it has to be one or the other, this book holds that Jamestown trumps Plymouth. But in fact both areas contributed in vital ways to the founding of the English colonies and a new nation. In the pages that follow, I present Virginia as the “mother of presidents” in the early republic—the birthplace of the Virginia dynasty. In addition, I present Virginia as what I call the “mother of states”—the key to much of the West, the area to the west of the states along the coast from Maine to Florida—in terms of the acquisition of that vast territory by the United States during the years of the Revolution and the early republic, and also in terms of the peopling of much of that territory during the next generation. The great Civil War detour, however, offers ample evidence—the greatest, though hardly the only evidence—that many major characteristics of the evolving nation took their shape in opposition to the vision of leading Virginians.

The subtitle—“A History of Virginia”—also warrants comment. The subtitle to the first edition, published in 2007, announced “Four Centuries of Virginia History,” but the book promptly proceeded to begin the story of English Virginia a generation before 1607, and we are now an ever-increasing number of years past 2007. Moreover, nobody can supply “The History of Virginia,” since no author can presume to know, let alone find space for, everything that might go into such a project, nor will everyone agree on what to include, what to emphasize, or how best to interpret it. In the interests of keeping my book from growing much larger than I wanted, I have had to keep my accounts short about a wide range of people, events, topics, themes, times, and places. Others I have neglected entirely. I have surveyed the colonial era, but I have paid less attention to it than to the time since 1776; so this is much more a history of the state of Virginia than of the colony, more an exploration of the nineteenth and twentieth
centuries than of the seventeenth or eighteenth. Not only do the four centuries get unequal space and attention here, but I also emphasize that though James-town was founded in 1607, Virginia began in the 1580s.

Two main features of the book are the illustrations and the sidebars. The latter mostly provide primary sources, the raw materials of historical reconstruc-tion, so that readers can see for themselves what was said on various important matters along the way. As for the photographs, some of them illustrate one facet or another of the text, while others expand the narrative, broaden the conversation, by introducing new dimensions. Many of the captions contain brief essays that can help readers pursue the past or see how it might be understood in different ways. Finally, in the bibliography, under “Books for Further Reading,” I offer a list of books as possible additional reading for each chapter.

The United States began, long before there was a United States, in a land called Virginia. There, first people from Europe and then people from Africa—and, later, people from other parts of our planet—met people already living there. Together, they created a new world. Virginia has had an enormous impact on the rest of North America and on the rest of the world, just as events outside Virginia have had great force in shaping it. It was not exactly—anywhere, at any time—what any Virginians wished. But it reflected the conflict and the cooperation among them all. Let’s see how it came about.
Part I

1580s–1760s

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Two worlds collided when Europeans came to Virginia, and people on each side had to figure out how best to proceed. The puzzle began by the 1570s and persisted into the seventeenth century and beyond. A warrior named Opechancanough and a young woman named Pocahontas suggest the early options from a Native American perspective.

Opechancanough and War

Opechancanough died in 1646, his age thought to be somewhere around 100. He died a captive of the English, after having tried in 1644 to drive the colonists out of the region. Two decades earlier, in 1622, he had made a similar attempt, one that had come even closer to success. Opechancanough saw no good future in the Chesapeake region for Native Americans if the English were to stay. Thus, this warrior and political leader took his stand.

Opechancanough, according to one surmise, in 1606 killed the last survivors of the “Lost Colony.” No guesswork is required about who or when, let alone whether, to know that it was Opechancanough who led the Powhatan Uprising in 1622 and another in 1644. If it were possible to prevent colonists—whether from Spain or England or anywhere else across the Atlantic Ocean—from making permanent settlements in the Chesapeake area, he would prevent it. No compromise, no middle way, was possible. It must be war, war to extermination. In this collision of two worlds, one would eliminate the other. Opechancanough
hoped it would be his people who came out victors. He died, and his hopes died with him.

*Pocahontas and Marriage*

Pocahontas, born much later than Opechancanough, died much sooner. Her short life proved as consequential as his. Her way was different. Maybe it was better, maybe not.

Most Virginia schoolchildren know something about Pocahontas, and some of what they know is true. She was a “favorite daughter” of Wahunsenacawh, also known as Powhatan, the chief of his people and the brother of Opechancanough. As a teenager, she married John Rolfe, one of the early settlers in the new English colony on the James River. Their marriage, in 1614, brought a truce in the early wars between the two races. On her trip to England, accompanying her husband and their young son Thomas, she was treated like royalty and was known as Lady Rebecca. English people saw her, daughter of an emperor, as a princess. Alas, the princess fell ill and died in 1617, and her husband returned to Virginia without her. The truce came to an end, and a few years later, after Powhatan, too, had died, Opechancanough led his great uprising of 1622 to kill off the newcomers.

By 1646, both Opechancanough and Pocahontas were dead. The Virginia colony continued to grow. In the collision of two worlds, the English world came to dominate, and the Powhatan people fell into near eclipse. Pocahontas had many descendants through her son Thomas Rolfe, and they took pride in their Powhatan ancestry. But they identified themselves as English, not Indian, and they generally recoiled from people whom they identified as Indians. They hoped that their children would not marry Indians—would not marry Opechancanough’s descendants. Some of Opechancanough’s kin, too, no doubt live today in Tidewater Virginia, but the world around them is by no means the one that Opechancanough hoped for.

In marrying a leading white settler and thus for a time bringing peace to Virginia, Pocahontas proved the great exception. We can, if we wish, say that Pocahontas was right in the path that she chose for herself—or that destiny brought her. But we cannot say that Opechancanough was wrong in his assessment of the future. Perhaps the truce that Pocahontas and John Rolfe achieved through their marriage gave the English time enough to build to a strength that Opechancanough could not overcome.
Chapter 1

Elizabethan Virginia

Sailing for Spain, Christopher Columbus made four voyages to the West Indies, which he mistook for the East Indies, on the other side of the world. After his first voyage, in 1492, he made three more before he died in 1506. A full century lay ahead before the Virginia Company dispatched an expedition that turned up at Jamestown. To put that long period into perspective, the time between Columbus’s death and the founding of Jamestown was about as long as the time between Presidents Andrew Johnson in the 1860s and Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s. The century after Columbus supplies essential background to the English adventure on the James River.

One important backdrop to developments during the sixteenth century was the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal. Two Catholic nations, these seafaring societies sharing the Iberian peninsula obtained papal approval of their plans, and the Treaty of Tordesillas provided a line that chopped the globe in two. Africa—both coasts—as well as west to Brazil and east to the East Indies was open to Portuguese adventuring. The rest of the Americas and much of the Pacific (west, it turned out, to the Philippines) was apportioned to Spain. No European explorer yet knew about the Chesapeake Bay region, but it would not fall in Portugal’s half of the planet. It would belong to Spain. No other nation need apply.

Clues to Very Early Virginia from a Sussex County Excavation

Four hundred years after Columbus arrived in what came to be called the Americas, archaeologists and other scholars tended to hold to a theory that American Indians all or mostly descended from migrants from Northeast Asia who made their way into the Western hemisphere little more than 13,000 years ago.
The “Clovis–first paradigm” supports that beginning date with evidence from a site near Clovis, New Mexico, one of many where “Clovis points” have been found, characteristic large sculpted “arrowheads” as smaller ones are popularly known. Among the various sites that, over the past twenty years, have increasingly called the Clovis–first theory into question, a particularly compelling one is Cactus Hill Archaeological Site, which lies in Southeastern Virginia, in Sussex County, not far from the Nottoway River. There, systematic investigation in the mid-1990s put the date back to at least 18,000 years ago, quite aside from allowing time—an indeterminate number of generations—for the group who summered there to have made their way to the area from their point of entry into the hemisphere.

Excavation at Cactus Hill revealed a Clovis–era layer of artifacts dating from a little under 13,000 years ago, but also a clearly pre–Clovis layer dating from 5,000 years earlier. Levels above those two tracked the story of Virginia’s first peoples far closer to the time of Spanish or English arrivals in what became Virginia. Science writer Charles C. Mann terms the many discoveries of the past generation as having confirmed that there were far more Indians when Columbus sailed than had long been thought; their American ancestors had been around for far longer than typically imagined; and they had, in science and technology, been in many places well in advance of their Eurasian counterparts. So whether Europe or North America is better characterized as the “new world” is an open question; and modern Virginia has produced a major piece of the puzzle in sorting out those historical matters. All of which is one way of saying that, when Europeans first sailed up the Chesapeake, they were approaching the portal to a vast world that had been for many thousands of years—perhaps eighteen or twenty thousand, perhaps more—inhabited by fellow humans. In the areas settled by Virginia colonists, however, the numbers were not huge.

The Long Century after Columbus

During the first fifty years after 1492, the Spanish explored and warred through much of the New World. Moreover, Ferdinand Magellan sailed for Spain in 1519 on a round-the-world voyage that, though he did not live to complete it, returned to Spain in 1522. For more and more Europeans, the planet was growing smaller and more familiar. Also in those first fifty years, the Spaniards Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Hernando de Soto, and Francisco Coronado trudged through huge swatches of territory between Florida and California.

England and France sent out feelers during this period as well. England got
into the act as early as 1497, when John Cabot—in his native Italian, his name was Giovanni Caboto—reached Nova Scotia, far to the north. Sailing in 1524 for the French, another Italian, Giovanni da Verrazano, cruised north along the Atlantic coast from the Carolinas to Canada, and a Frenchman, Jacques Cartier, explored much of eastern Canada, reaching Montreal. As early as 1534, Cartier identified the St. Lawrence River as a major point of entry into the continent, and in 1541 he attempted, though without success, to establish a colony in the area.

In the Southeast during the second half of the sixteenth century, Spain established a fortress at St. Augustine in Florida in 1565. In the southwest, after heading north from their base in Mexico, Spanish explorers by 1600 had moved into what they named New Mexico, and by 1610 had founded Santa Fe. The Spanish grew ever less impressed with the prospects in eastern North America anywhere north of Florida—moreover, they considered “Florida” to extend well up the coast, and regardless of the prospects there, they did not want interlopers from other lands. The French found this out after they built a settlement near today’s Jacksonville in 1564. Upon discovering the intrusion, the Spanish utterly destroyed it.

By 1580, Francis Drake had done Magellan one better, surviving a voyage that took him around the world, during which he sailed north along the California coast. By then, the Spanish, French, and English had explored much of the Gulf coast, the Atlantic coast, and the Pacific coast of what would much later become the contiguous forty-eight states of the United States of America. The Spanish had made far more progress than any other European power in establishing colonies or settlements in the New World. But the French and the English had indicated a considerable interest as well, though neither had yet put down a permanent settlement.

The English, the Spanish, and the People of the Chesapeake

Who Discovered Them

In 1492, the year Columbus first sailed off to what he thought was going to be Asia, Spain expelled its non-Catholics—both its Jewish residents and its Muslim residents. People of the three faiths had gotten along quite well for many years, but the time had come, the rulers decided, to push for a religiously more homogeneous society as they built a nation-state.

A half century later, England embarked on a variation of that experience when Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church, denying the pope authority over England, in particular any say over Henry’s marriages. A struggle between supporters of the Church of England and adherents of the Catholic
faith racked the kingdom through much of the reign of Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII by Anne Boleyn, the second of his six wives.

The fact that Spain was Catholic, and England not, spurred a rivalry between the two that took shape in the eastern Atlantic in a naval struggle and in the western Atlantic in a competition to colonize. The most notable naval encounter took place in 1588 off the coast of England when the great Spanish Armada failed in a mighty effort to humble the apostate English.

All the while the Spanish and the English were embarking on their divergent paths through religious conflict and nation building, not to mention empire building, in the Chesapeake region a different group of people went about their lives. The Virginia Algonquians—the Powhatans—of the Tidewater area west of the Chesapeake Bay also grew in power. Their chief, or commander, in the late sixteenth century was Powhatan, who was probably in his sixties when the English came to Jamestown. His region, the Tsenacommacah, or Tsenacomoco, had a population of perhaps 15,000 in 1607, across a territory that had grown to approximately 60 miles by 100 miles. The last group to fall to Powhatan dominance before Jamestown were the Chesapeakes, early in 1607, in the Norfolk area. At no time had the Powhatans been more powerful—their political control more consolidated, their territory larger.

These were the Americans who discovered Europe when Europeans came to them. But some actually traveled to Europe or to Britain themselves.

Spanish Virginia

At various times during the sixteenth century, the Spanish showed up along the coast of what later became Virginia or North Carolina. When they left after one such occasion, about 1560, they took with them a young man whose Spanish name became Don Luis. For about ten years he lived in Madrid, Havana, or Mexico City. During that time he not only converted to Catholicism but also, no doubt, learned a great deal about Spanish behavior toward Native Americans in the Caribbean, and about Spanish war making as well, as his mentor in Havana was the military governor there. A group of nine Jesuits took him from their base in Havana to the Chesapeake in September 1570, hoping he would act as guide and interpreter and help them establish themselves and evangelize his countrymen. The nine Jesuits spent several months between the James and York rivers, but Don Luis chose to rejoin his people, and in February 1571, he ended the Jesuits’ mission by having them killed. Spared among the Spanish was a boy, Alonso, whom a Spanish military expedition from Havana picked up the next year, and from his testimony we know the story of the fate of the Spanish mission on the James.
Spanish and English ships alike visited the Chesapeake area in the 1580s and later. In 1603 a small group described as “Virginia natives” exhibited canoes and how to make use of them—in London. A year or two later, a ship went up the Rappahannock River; it was well received at first, but then things went awry, and a chief of the Indians was shot and killed. None of these visits resulted in a settlement that lasted any longer than had the Spanish mission in 1570–1571, but each gave residents of the region some experience of encounters with strangers, aliens with strange appearances and behavior, who kidnapped, killed, or otherwise mistreated people they ran across. Spain continued to view the region as within its jurisdiction, but the area had never been a focus of their efforts, mission or military, and the one serious venture that took them to eastern Virginia ended in a way that showed why Virginia never became Spanish.

*Between Two Worlds, Spanish and Native American: Don Luis and the Scholars*

Centuries after a teenaged Indian boy was taken in 1560 by the Spanish to places far away from his Chesapeake homeland, he has remained an important figure in people’s imagination and in the historical reconstruction both of how it was that the Spanish did not colonize the Chesapeake region first, and of how the English adventure fared when it finally got under way. A Richmond writer, James Branch Cabell, dubbed Don Luis the “first Virginian.” In Cabell’s view, Don Luis’s treachery prevented Spanish settlement on the Chesapeake and thus preserved Virginia for subsequent English occupation.

One historian, Carl Bridenbaugh, suggested that the Indian leader Opechancanough was in fact Don Luis, so he had direct knowledge of the European world from a lengthy visit to Spain and then to Spanish settlements in the Caribbean islands and in Mexico. In view of Opechancanough’s putative age of 100 in 1646, the time line fits. Certainly some teenaged son of a chief had accompanied Spanish explorers in the early 1560s away to Spain and the Caribbean, had spent several years with them, had probably seen the way the Spanish treated their Indian laborers, had accompanied the Spanish group of priests in 1570 to the James River, and, after killing his companions, had taken up the life in the Chesapeake that he had put aside ten years before. That young man postponed European settlement on the James from 1571 to 1607—and may also, according to Bridenbaugh, have been the man who then tried in 1622 and again in 1644 to eliminate that settlement as well.

But most scholars have rejected the Bridenbaugh hypothesis, intriguing though it is. Anthropologist Helen Rountree, for one, notes that if Opechanc-
canough had had as much experience among the Spanish as did Don Luis, he
would not have pulled back in 1622 after his devastating initial attacks at James-
town and elsewhere as though he expected the English, having been so thor-
oughly pummeled, to pull up stakes and leave.

Spanish Conquistadors in Western Virginia: New Views

The past keeps changing, and recently discovered archaeological and archival
materials have revised the known history of sixteenth-century Virginia. Spanish
soldiers were in Saltville, in western Virginia, a few years before Spanish mis-
sionaries landed on the James River in eastern Virginia.

From 1539 to 1543, Hernando de Soto led a band of marauding Spaniards on
the first great expedition by Europeans through the Southeast, an expedition
that lasted longer and covered more distance than did the much later westward
trip, farther north, of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Charles Hudson, an
expert on early Indian and Spanish history, came to realize in the 1980s that the
expedition led by Juan Pardo, some twenty-five years after Soto's expedition, had
covered much of the same route, so Hudson began a study of the Pardo route
and sought historian Paul Hoffman's help with the Spanish documents.

Deciphering and translating the spidery writing and archaic language of old
documents in the Spanish archives is a highly specialized enterprise, and Hoff-
man is one of a very few experts at it. The Hudson and Hoffman team prepared
a book of new translations in which they speculated about the route the Spanish
had taken. Before publishing it in 1990, they had it reviewed by Warren Wil-
son College archaeologist David Moore, based in western North Carolina, near
Asheville, who was attuned to the possibility of an early Spanish presence in his
region.

Meanwhile, in 1986, fourteen-year-old Robin Beck picked up some artifacts
on a farm owned by his aunt and uncle, Pat and James Berry, in Burke County,
a few miles north of Morganton. He took the artifacts to Moore, who identi-
fied them as Spanish in origin and urged Beck to be on the lookout for more.
Beck then found fragments of a glazed olive jar, a wrought-iron nail, and shards
of pottery of a type called grayware that matched specimens known from the
Spanish port of Santa Elena on the South Carolina coast. Moore and Hudson
were ecstatic. Soto had probably passed through the Morganton area about 1541,
but the artifacts at the Berry site came from the 1567 Pardo expedition, which
had planted short-lived missions across North Carolina.

Pardo and his alferoz, or sergeant, Hernando Moyano, were based for a time
near Morganton. The Spanish records relate that a mountain chief sent a threat
Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603). During Elizabeth’s forty-five-year reign the English began venturing in the New World for colonies. Never married, she was known as the Virgin Queen. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Sir Walter Ralegh (also spelled Raleigh; c.1552–1618). In the 1580s he named the English settlement in the Roanoke Island area after Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen. The Jamestown colony was not established until after her death, but the name “Virginia” persisted. Engraving by Simon van de Passe. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-2951.
to Sergeant Moyano, who was not averse to a fight, particularly when it would be in the mountains, as, ever since discovering how rich in gold were the Aztecs of Mexico and the Incas of Peru, conquistadors believed cities in the mountains to be a means to great wealth. So he marched north to a place that other Spanish records tell had salt springs from which the Indians made salt—today’s Saltville, the only such place in the area. There, the records say, fifteen Spanish soldiers killed more than 1,000 Indians and burned fifty huts, the first recorded battle by Europeans on Virginian soil. Saltville had salt but no gold, however, and Moyano returned to base disappointed.

Stimulated by the discovery of archaeological evidence and a new interest in Pardo, John Worth, doing archival work in Seville, Spain, discovered and translated a previously unknown document that shed further light on Pardo and Moyano. The document, a letter written in 1584 to the king of Spain by an old soldier seeking a pension, confirmed the battle. In that letter, Domingo de León told the king of his service in Moyano’s attack on Saltville, and he also said an Indian woman from Saltville (a casica) had married a Spaniard and in 1584 was living in the fort of St. Augustine, Florida.

That woman, Luisa Menendez (the records do not tell her Indian name), herself gave testimony at St. Augustine in 1600. She said she was a native of the place where the salt springs flowed and where Moyano had attacked. She had become the young bride of a Spanish soldier named Juan de Ribas, a member of the Pardo expedition, and had moved with her husband first to Santa Elena and then to St. Augustine. As for Ribas, he testified at the same hearing in 1600 that his wife had been a “chieftainess.”

A Latino presence, both east and west of the Blue Ridge, dates from before any English settlement in what became Virginia. In 1567, English settlement at Jamestown lay forty years in the future. Preceding Pocahontas—Lady Rebecca, wife of an English soldier—by nearly half a century in what became Virginia was another Indian princess, Luisa Menendez, wife of a Spanish soldier.

Roanoke Island

English America had its beginnings at Roanoke Island, located today on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. In 1584, Elizabeth I gave Sir Walter Ralegh (often spelled Raleigh) authority to explore and colonize an area of North America north of Spanish Florida.

Ralegh’s first expedition set out that year, two vessels captained by Philip Amadas and Arthur Barowe. They reached Roanoke Island, selected it as a possible place for an English settlement, and named the entire Atlantic-coast region
How They Catch Fish. In the 1580s, John White produced various watercolor illustrations (they are housed at the British Museum) of Native American life in the Roanoke Island area, subsequently published as engravings by Theodor de Bry in *Grands Voyages* (1590). This composite shows fishing by spear, weir, and basket, or dip net, with fishing done either wading in the water or moving about in a dugout log canoe. These Carolina Algonquians’ lives resembled those of the Virginia Algonquians, the people whom the English met a generation later in the Jamestown area. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
“Virginia.” A second expedition, under Sir Richard Grenville, followed the next year with seven vessels and 600 men. When Grenville, too, returned to England, he left behind 107 men under Ralph Lane to build houses and a fort on the island. They did so, but they also antagonized local Indians, who responded by making life difficult for them.

The next year, 1586, three expeditions reached Roanoke Island. A relief vessel came, followed by three ships under Grenville, but not before Sir Francis Drake appeared, and Lane and his men chose to leave with Drake for England. Grenville left a new group of fifteen men to hold the fort through the following winter, but they were attacked and killed by Indians. Thus, after not only many visits during three summers but also two groups of men directed to winter on the island, nothing permanent had emerged.
In 1587, an effort was again made to settle the island. Three vessels carried 112 people, among them women and children as well as soldiers. John White, who had accompanied one of the earlier voyages and had produced many drawings of the area and its Indian inhabitants, commanded the 1587 expedition and settlement effort. The community rebuilt the fort, repaired the houses, and settled in at the “Citty of Raleigh.” White’s daughter, Eleanor Dare, had a daughter, Virginia Dare—named, of course, after the colony of Virginia, to signify her birth as the first English child born in English America. England’s effort to colonize the New World was under way.

White left Roanoke Island to return to England for supplies and more settlers. Instead of returning the next year, he had to wait three years. England had gone to war with Spain, Spaniards captured White when he tried to return, and then he had to wait for ships to become available at the end of the war. When he returned in 1590, he found the fort and houses deserted and the colonists nowhere to be seen, and the only clue was the word “Croatoan” carved in a tree. Roanoke Island became known as the Lost Colony rather than the First Colony. The Spanish Armada was vanquished, but so was England’s first stab at founding a colony in North America.

Elizabethan Virginia

As knowledge of the western Atlantic emerged across the second half of the sixteenth century—during the reign of Queen Elizabeth—a few men in England played particularly significant roles in promoting an English attempt to acquire riches, establish trade, thwart the Spanish, explore new areas, or develop colonies. Sir Francis Drake, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, and Sir Walter Ralegh were among the leading figures to have sailed out to the wider world. At home in England were promoters who never traveled anywhere but nonetheless proved central to English colonization. Two men—relatives, both named Richard Hakluyt—synthesized and published the information coming in from overseas, and between them they generated a coherent theory of colonization. The English would seek to maintain friendly relations with such people as they encountered, and they would proselytize them, bringing them into the Christian fold. But regardless, the English would plant permanent settlements. The colonies would absorb excess English population and supply the home country with raw materials as well as a market for processed goods. The major writings of Richard Hakluyt the younger appeared at just about the time of the Roanoke adventure. The last of them, The Principal Navigations (1589), recounts the exploits of such English adventurers as Gilbert and Ralegh.
The queen died in 1603, and Elizabethan Virginia faded into lore, before another effort to launch the colony could be made. In 1607, twenty years after the 1587 expedition, England tried again to establish a permanent New World colony in Virginia. This time the attempt was made at Jamestown, and it persisted. One of its purposes, never much accomplished, was to solve the mystery of the Lost Colony. John White’s artwork remains to depict the lives of area Indians, the original American people, from the time of his failed effort at colonization during the first launching of Virginia. Roanoke Island eventually fell outside Virginia’s boundary and became part of North Carolina—had the place been called Carolina in the 1580s, the baby girl born there in August 1587 might have been named Caroline Dare.

By the early 1600s, the European nations that had been exploring North America began putting down roots farther north than Florida. A French effort succeeded at Quebec in 1608. The French nation would not forever control the vast area around that settlement, but 400 years later most of the people there spoke French and identified themselves as Catholics. The Dutch explored the Hudson River in 1609, and at the mouth of that river they soon established a colony, New Netherlands, from which the great city of New York would emerge. The Dutch, too, were dislodged as a colonial power in North America, but the settlement they began continued under new management, and 400 years later one can still find Dutch architecture there, not to mention places with names like Van Cortlandt Park.

Among settlements by Europeans in North America, St. Augustine came first, with its soldiers and slaves and missions. Four decades later, at pretty much the same time as the French established Quebec to the north and the Spanish founded Santa Fe in the Southwest, the English planted Jamestown. Not only did Jamestown precede Plymouth in New England, it preceded Quebec and Santa Fe, although not by as much.