



CHAPTER 2

English Colonies in America

ENGLAND CHALLENGES SPAIN

The wealth and splendor of Spain's American empire attracted other Europeans the way flowers in springtime attract honeybees. The English in particular were envious of Spain. They longed to build an empire in the Americas. They hoped for a share of the gold and silver that almost everyone believed was so plentiful in the new land, and they wanted American products such as sugar and rice, which could not be grown in their cold northern climate.

In 1497, not very long after the news of Columbus's discovery reached England, King Henry VII sent John Cabot on a voyage of exploration. Cabot sailed along the coast of Newfoundland, giving England a claim to the northern regions of America. At that time

This oil painting seems to have its own light playing upon the sails of John Cabot's ship. He receives a final blessing before setting forth on his voyage to North America in 1497. Titled "The Departure of the Cabots," it was painted in 1906 by Ernest Board. It clearly shows the elaborate trappings of 15th-century England. What lands were claimed by the British following this voyage of exploration? *The northern regions of America.*

City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery



Spain seemed too powerful to challenge. Only in the 1550s, after Queen Elizabeth I inherited the throne, did English interest in America become serious.

Elizabeth, ruling England alone in a world dominated by men, was a person of the strongest will and ambition. She was a shrewd ruler and a clever diplomat who paid little attention to right and wrong. Elizabeth never married, perhaps because no man could be her equal. She had a temper to match her fiery red hair and a tongue to match her sharp features. She was well aware of England's limited strength compared to Spain's. She proceeded cautiously.

One way to weaken Spain without openly going to war was to attack Spanish merchant ships on the high seas. In those days a ship out of sight of land was at the mercy of any more powerful vessel. There was no way to call for help or even to send an alert. A fast, powerfully armed ship could overtake a clumsy Spanish galleon loaded with treasure. The crew would be easily overcome, the cargo taken off, and the ship sent to the bottom. No one could prove that the ship had not run on a rocky reef in a fog and been dashed to pieces, or gone down in a storm, as in fact frequently happened.

The Spanish considered such attackers pirates, and rightly so. Nevertheless, Elizabeth encouraged English captains to roam the trade routes between Spain and its colonies in America in search of such prey.

The most famous of what the English affectionately called their **sea dogs** was Francis Drake. In 1577 Drake began the most famous of his many escapades. From England he sailed his ship, the *Golden Hind*, across the Atlantic and through the Strait of Magellan. In the Pacific he captured the *Cacafuego*, a Spanish galleon carrying a fortune in silver from Peru. Then he sailed north to California, which he claimed for England.

From California Drake crossed the Pacific and Indian Oceans, rounded Africa, and returned home. When he reached England in 1580, Drake presented Queen Elizabeth with treasure worth about twice her normal annual income. Little wonder that Elizabeth made him Sir Francis Drake, a knight of the kingdom, right there on the deck of the *Golden Hind*.

Drake sailed again into Spanish waters in 1585. This time he terrorized Spanish towns in the Caribbean islands. "Drake the Dragon," the Spanish called him. Furious, the king of Spain, Philip II, collected the largest fleet the world had ever seen—130 ships carrying 30,000 men and armed with 2,400 cannons. In 1588 this mighty **Spanish Armada** sailed from Spain to invade England.

Not one Spanish sailor or soldier set foot on English soil, except as a captive. Elizabeth's ships were fewer but easier to maneuver and more powerful. They sank many of the attackers. Storms finished off

still more. Only about half the Armada limped back to Spanish ports. With Spain's navy shattered and shaken, the stage was set for England to carve a place for itself in America.

- Why did England decide it would challenge Spain's power in America?
- How did Queen Elizabeth try to weaken Spain?
- What was the significance of the defeat of the Spanish Armada?

FALSE STARTS IN AMERICA

Even before the defeat of the Armada, English sailors were visiting North American waters in increasing numbers. By the 1570s about 50 vessels were catching fish on the Grand Banks off the coast of Newfoundland. Some of the fishermen established temporary camps ashore. In 1578 Queen Elizabeth issued a document called a **charter** to Sir Humphrey Gilbert. This charter gave Gilbert the right to establish and control a colony in America. Operating under the charter, Gilbert landed on Newfoundland with a party of 200. He officially claimed the island for England. This group did not stay, and Gilbert was drowned when his ship went down in a storm while returning home.

When Humphrey Gilbert was eight, his father had died. Later his mother married a man named Raleigh. They had a son, Walter, Humphrey's half-brother. He grew up to be the handsome and charming Sir Walter Raleigh, a close adviser of Queen Elizabeth. Two years after Humphrey Gilbert's death, Raleigh sent seven ships carrying over a hundred men to America. They were to establish a colony and look for gold.

Raleigh did not accompany the group. Some said Queen Elizabeth was in love with him at this time and would not let him leave her court. His colonists passed the winter on an island called **Roanoke** off the coast of what is now North Carolina. One of them, an artist and mapmaker named John White, painted many fascinating watercolors of the Indians of the region and of the plants and animals there. These pictures tell us a great deal about the life and culture of the American Indians of the Atlantic Coast.

No gold was found at Roanoke. The colonists fought with the local Indians. Life was hard. When Sir Francis Drake arrived at Roanoke in June 1586 on his way back from his raid in the Caribbean, the colonists eagerly accepted his offer of passage back to England.

Ever hopeful, in 1587 Raleigh dispatched another hundred-odd colonists to Carolina, headed by John White. For the first time women were sent out, among them White's married daughter, Ellinor Dare. These colonists landed at Roanoke in July, and on

National Portrait Gallery, London



Here stand the swashbuckling Sir Walter Raleigh and his son Wat, proud Englishmen in Queen Elizabeth's court. The artist who painted this lifelike oil in 1602 is unknown. What American colony did Raleigh sponsor? *Roanoke.*

August 18 Ellinor Dare gave birth to a daughter, Virginia, the first English child born in America.

A few days later John White sailed back to England for more supplies. He intended to return promptly, but he could not because of the national crisis caused by the attack of the Spanish Armada. Other delays followed and White did not get back to Roanoke until 1591. The island was deserted. No one has ever discovered what happened to the inhabitants of this **Lost Colony** of Roanoke.

- Why did the first settlers on Roanoke Island want to return to England?

MOTIVES OF THE COLONIZERS

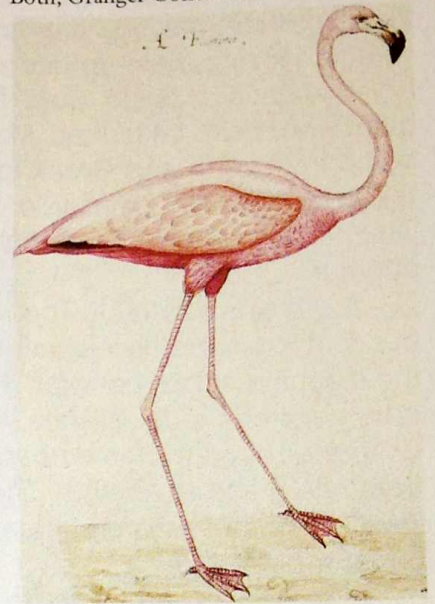
Despite the setbacks, many important people in England remained very interested in America. For the queen and other political leaders, a major attraction was the hope of finding gold and silver to increase the wealth and power of England. Another was to reduce the power of Spain, which already controlled so much of the Americas. For upper-class gentlemen like Raleigh and Gilbert, the chief goals were adventure, honor, and fame.

There were more practical, down-to-earth reasons. Many people were out of work in England. Because of a rising demand for woolen cloth, many landowners had stopped farming and begun raising sheep. They fenced in, or enclosed, their fields and planted them in grass for the sheep. This was known as the **enclosure movement**. Raising sheep took much less labor than growing grain, so many serfs and tenants who had farmed the land now had to look for work elsewhere. Some found jobs in the towns. Others wandered about the countryside, often stealing and disturbing the peace. These people, put out of work and home by the enclosure movement, drained strength from England. Perhaps they could be resettled and made useful workers again in American colonies. People who thought this way saw America as a safety valve to get rid of troublemakers and keep English jails from overflowing.

The expanding cloth industry in England gave a boost to foreign trade and made many merchants rich. These merchants were eager to invest their profits in colonial ventures. For them America was a new business opportunity. Finally, there was still the hope for a practical westward route to the Indies. Although the trip around South America was too long to be profitable, maybe a **northwest passage** around or through North America could be discovered.

- Why were each of the following interested in colonizing America: the queen and other political leaders? gentlemen? landowners? merchants? explorers?

Both, Granger Collection



John White of Roanoke made these lovely watercolors of an American flamingo and an alligator in about 1585. Why are White's drawings valuable in the study of history?

They tell about the life and culture of the time and place.

MERCHANT ADVENTURERS

The experiences of men like Gilbert and Raleigh proved that founding a colony was expensive and risky. Most English merchants and manufacturers were shrewd and cautious in business, not daring adventures or high-born court favorites. Instead of outfitting expeditions as individuals, they organized what they called **joint-stock companies**. These companies were ancestors of our corporations. They were owned by many stockholders who shared in the profits and losses of the enterprise.

The London merchant Sir Thomas Smythe was typical of these **merchant adventurers**. Smythe backed the first English attempt to sail around Africa. In 1600 he helped found the East India Company, which received exclusive rights from the English government to trade with the Indies. He also invested money in a number of expedi-

SCALA/EPA



This happy country scene hides the dark passions caused by the rustic fence. It separates the wheat field from the sheep who are yielding up their wool to the shearers. When the enclosure movement made work scarce, some Englishmen looked to America. A monk hand-colored this page from a breviary, a book used for daily prayers, and titled his work "Month of August." What caused the landowners to enclose their fields and graze sheep? *A rising demand for woolen cloth.*

tions into Arctic waters in search of the northwest passage. Smythe was the treasurer of the Virginia Company of London and its guiding spirit.

The joint-stock Virginia Company was given charters by James I, who became king of England after his cousin Queen Elizabeth died in 1603. In 1606 James gave the **London Company** the right to develop a huge area of North America. The region was named **Virginia** in honor of Queen Elizabeth, who because she never married was known as the Virgin Queen.

Virginia extended along the Atlantic Coast from about the latitude of New York City to what is now South Carolina, and west "from sea to sea"—that is, all the way to the Pacific Ocean! Obviously neither King James nor the merchants nor anyone else in England had the slightest idea of how enormous this grant was. The country had never been explored. The charter shows what big ideas the colonizers had, as well as their disregard for the rights of the native inhabitants of America. Because a few of his explorers had nosed their way along the Atlantic beaches, King James claimed the right to dispose of the whole continent.

- Why were joint-stock companies organized?
- What boundaries were established by the Virginia Company charter?

JAMESTOWN: THE FIRST COLONY

A few days before Christmas 1606, the London Company sent off three ships, the *Discovery*, the *Susan Constant*, and the *Godspeed*, bearing 104 settlers. Their destination was Virginia, their purpose to build a town and search for gold, silver, and copper.

The three little ships reached Virginia on April 26, 1607. They sailed up a river, which they named after the king. A few days later they chose a place to build a fort on a peninsula jutting out into the river. They called this settlement **Jamestown**.

From the start life in Jamestown was an endless series of troubles. The site was easy to defend but swampy and infested with fever-bearing mosquitoes. By the end of summer half the colonists had died, and many of those who remained were down with malaria. Because the planting season had ended before the colonists had finished building houses and walling the town, they were unable to get a crop in the ground. Soon they were desperately short of food. When the first ship from England arrived the next spring, only 38 colonists were alive to greet it.

The colony also suffered from poor leadership. King James named a council to rule it. He appointed mostly stockholders in the London Company. They did not go to Jamestown and knew almost nothing



New York Public Library Picture Collection

about the difficulties the settlers faced. For example, there was no sign of gold in the area around Jamestown. Yet the London authorities insisted that the colonists spend much of their energy searching for the precious metal. The Londoners did create a local council in Virginia, supposedly to handle day-to-day problems, but they gave the councilors no real authority.

Still worse, the Virginia councilors quarreled among themselves and allowed the colonists to neglect the basic tasks of planting crops and making the settlement safe.

The Jamestown settlers were poorly prepared for the great challenge of living in the new country. The 36 so-called gentlemen among them had none of the skills needed by pioneers, such as carpentry and farming. They were unaccustomed to hard labor of any kind. As for the others, there were goldsmiths, perfumers, and jewelers, who were certainly skilled—but in the wrong trades. Not one of them had ever been a real farmer. Too many settlers apparently believed that in America wealth grew on trees. They did not realize that it was necessary to work hard if they wished to stay alive.

Fortunately, one man among these colonists had the courage to take command. He was John Smith. Smith was a swashbuckler, a **soldier of fortune**, who was prepared to sell his sword to whoever would pay for it. He was a short, bearded fellow of 27, a man of action. He had seen far more of the world than any of the other settlers. He had fought in a number of wars in eastern Europe against the

The Jamestown settlers clear land and put up houses while living in tents in this engraving from the 19th century. Others bring stores from one of the ships at anchor in the James River of Virginia. How were the actual experiences of the first colonists different from the peaceful scene shown here? *They were hampered by malaria, food shortages, and their own inexperience.*



John Smith was 27 years old when he took command of the Jamestown settlement. This engraving portrays Smith at the age of 33. Why was he known as a soldier of fortune? *He sold his sword to whomever would pay for it.*

Turks. In one war he was captured, taken to Constantinople, and sold into slavery. However, he managed to kill his master and escape. After many other remarkable adventures Smith found himself in Virginia.

In 1608 Smith was elected president of the Virginia council. Once in charge, he bargained with the Indians for food. He stopped the foolish searching for gold. Instead he put people to work building shelters and planting food crops. Hard work and strict discipline became the order of the day.

- Why did so many of the first settlers in Jamestown die?
- Why did the colonists have such a hard time obtaining food?
- What changes did John Smith make when he became president of the Virginia council?

REFORMS FOR VIRGINIA

Virginia's difficulties finally convinced the merchant adventurers in England that the London Company needed to be reorganized. In 1609 Sir Edmund Sandys, a councilor who was also a member of Parliament, England's legislative body, obtained a new charter from King James. This charter called for the appointment of a powerful governor who would rule the colony from Jamestown rather than from London.

The London Company then raised a good deal more money and outfitted a fleet of nine ships to carry about 600 new settlers across the Atlantic. Those who paid their own fare received one share of stock in the company. Those who could not pay agreed to work as servants of the company for seven years in return for their passage. Until 1616 everything the colonists produced was to be put into a common storehouse or fund. On that date the servants would have worked off their debt to the company. Then the profits of the enterprise were to be divided among the shareholders—both the investors back in England and the settlers. Every shareholder would also receive a grant of Virginia land.

These were fine plans but hard to put into effect. Conditions in Virginia got worse and worse. The first governor, Lord De La Warr, put off coming to Jamestown. The years from 1609 to 1611 were a starving time. Settlers ate dogs and mice. They ate the remains of an Indian killed in battle. According to John Smith, one hungry colonist butchered his own wife for food. For this crime, Smith explained, "he was executed, as he well deserved." At one point the colonists almost decided to abandon the settlement and return to England.

Then things began to improve in 1611 when the council appointed Thomas Dale, a soldier with a reputation for sternness, as governor. Dale arrived with fresh supplies and a new group of set-

In the long run what made Virginia prosper was tobacco. When the colonists realized that there was no gold and silver to be found, they looked for other sources of wealth. They tried to raise silkworms, to make glass, to grow wine grapes—all without success. Tobacco was a different story. The plant was native to America. The Indians prized it highly, using it for personal enjoyment and in their ceremonies. Sir Francis Drake brought tobacco to England from the West Indies after his raid, and Sir Walter Raleigh made smoking fashionable in high society. The habit spread quickly in England.

It is interesting that from the very start many people argued that smoking was unhealthy. King James himself opposed the use of tobacco. Although he considered it beneath his dignity to engage in public debate, he published anonymously an essay on the subject. This "Counterblast to Tobacco" described smoking as a "vile and stinking" habit that would injure the lungs and the brain. Thousands of King James's subjects ignored his warning. Demand for tobacco soared in England.

The Indians of Virginia grew and smoked tobacco, but this local plant had a harsh and bitter taste. A colonist named John Rolfe, who came to Jamestown about 1610, solved the problem by bringing in tobacco seeds from the Spanish colonies. This variety of tobacco flourished in Virginia and produced a much milder smoke. In 1616 Virginia farmers exported about 2,200 pounds (1,000 kilograms) of tobacco to England. Two years later they exported more than 20 times that amount.

The Virginians now had a cash crop they could sell in England. They were able to purchase the manufactured items they could not yet produce themselves: cloth, tools, furniture, guns. Little wonder that King Charles I, who succeeded James I in 1625, joked that Virginia was "built upon smoke."

A Colony Built Upon Smoke



Ingham Foster Collection, courtesy
Jamestown Foundation

tlers in March. He promptly resumed the tough course set by John Smith. He soon became very unpopular because of his harsh rule. A man convicted of stealing some oatmeal was chained to a tree and allowed to starve to death. The colonists charged that Dale was a tyrant. Nevertheless, they began to plant corn, repair the fort, and work to make sure that the colony would survive.

- How severe was the "starving time" of 1609 to 1611?
- What helped conditions in Jamestown begin to improve?

HEADRIGHTS AND INDENTURES

In 1618 the London Company launched a campaign to attract more investors and settlers to Virginia. Colonists who paid their own way or that of others would receive 50 acres (20 hectares) of land for each "head" transported. This was called a **headright**. The company relaxed the rigorous discipline that Thomas Dale had imposed as governor of the colony. It guaranteed all settlers the same legal rights that English subjects had at home. It also gave settlers a voice in the local government of the colony. They would be allowed to elect representatives to an assembly known as the **House of Burgesses**. This was the first elected government body in America. Along with the governor's council, the House was given the power to make laws for the colony. It first met at Jamestown in 1619.

The London Company made an all-out effort to develop many kinds of products in the colony. But tobacco remained Virginia's most important commodity by far. As the price of tobacco rose, everyone rushed to plant more of it. The broad, green leaves of tobacco plants could be seen growing in the streets of Jamestown.

Growing tobacco required a great deal of labor. In Jamestown hands to work the land were in short supply. Those settlers who had money had a tremendous advantage in obtaining workers because of the headright system. Poor people who wanted to come to Virginia signed contracts called **indentures**. They agreed to work for seven years to pay off the cost of getting to America. These contracts of indenture could be bought and sold. The newcomer, who was called an **indentured servant**, had to work without wages for the person who owned the indenture. That same person also received the headright issued by the colonial government for bringing the newcomer to Virginia. He could therefore claim 50 acres (20 hectares) of land. In other words, the person who paid the passage of the immigrant received both land and the labor needed to farm the land for one price.

The great tobacco boom did the London Company little good. By the time the boom began, the original colonists had already served their seven years and were no longer working for the company.

- How did the London Company try to attract new settlers?
- How did the indenture system bring some a double benefit?

BLOODSHED IN JAMESTOWN

The colonists treated their Indian neighbors far worse than they treated their indentured servants. In the early days Jamestown could not have survived without the Indians. They gave the starving colonists food. They taught them how to live in the wilderness. The land around Jamestown was a dense forest. Corn, a native American plant grown by the Indians, would not grow for the colonists in forest

shade. It would take years to cut down the huge trees and root out their stumps. The Indians showed the colonists how to kill the trees by cutting a ring around the trunks. Sunlight could then shine through the dead and leafless branches, and corn planted by the colonists sprouted between the trunks.

The colonists accepted the Indians' help and advice and then tried to take control of their homelands! The local Indians of course resisted. In a sudden attack in 1622 they killed about 350 colonists, almost one third of Virginia's European population. The bloodshed convinced King James that the colony, which was already being mismanaged, should be taken away from the London Company. In 1624 he canceled the charter and put Virginia under direct royal control. The Company was bankrupt. The stockholders lost their investment.

- How did the Indians help the Jamestown colonists?
- Why did the local Indians attack the colonists?

THE PILGRIMS

In 1617 Sir Edwin Sandys was trying to put Virginia's affairs in order. A community of people who were living in Holland asked him for permission to settle in America somewhere within the London Company's grant. These **Pilgrims**, as we now call them, had left England in 1608 to escape religious persecution. Pilgrims were people who had "separated" themselves from the Anglican Church, the Church of England. They were **Separatists**. The Dutch had not inter-

From this harbor in Plymouth the Pilgrims sailed from England to Holland in 1608. Charles Shimmin painted this oil in 1918, taking care to show the simple Pilgrim dress. Why did the Pilgrims leave their homes in England? *To escape religious persecution.*

Woolaroc Museum

