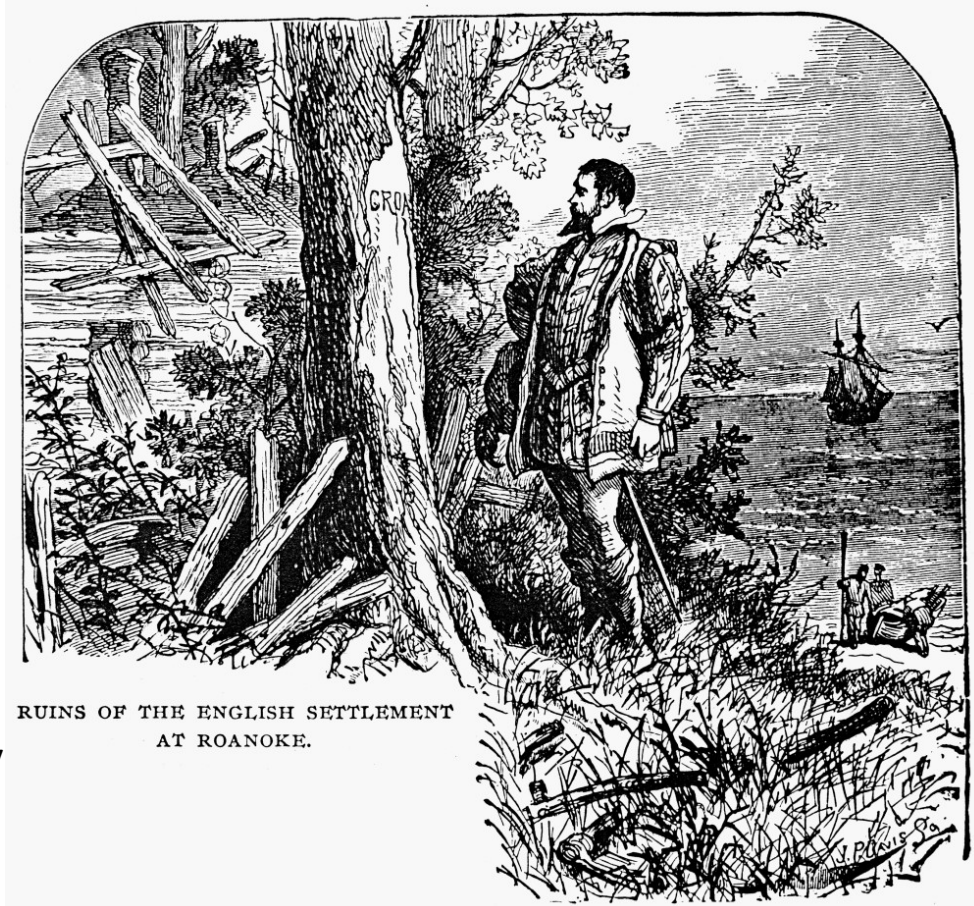


# Earliest Monuments of American Literature

## Early Reports on the Roanoke Colony

- Arthur Barlowe (1584) and John Lane, the Governor of the 1st colony (1586)
- The most important report is by **Thomas Hariot**, an astronomer, mathematician and translator, entitled *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588). Accompanied by the drawings of **John White** (next slide).
- The main purpose of Hariot's report is **to promote colonization**. Therefore its **first part contains a description of all commodities** that the new land can yield and **the second part catalogs all agricultural plants grown by the Native Americans** and discusses their possible uses. **The last part deals with the life of the natives and their culture, including religion.**
- **The 112 - 121 inhabitants** of the first Roanoke colony **disappeared** and the settlement was in ruins (known as the Lost Colony) at the return of Simon Fernandes and John White in 1590. The disappearance was never satisfactorily explained (no archaeological findings).
- **John White became the Governor of the second Roanoke colony.** The lack of adaptation of the early colonizers and their dependence on the agriculture of the local Native American tribe, the Secotans, is documented in White's report.
- All early reports were published in Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffics and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589, 1600).



RUINS OF THE ENGLISH SETTLEMENT  
AT ROANOKE.

**Ruins at the Origin:** John White, the Governor of the second Roanoke colony, looks at the ruins of the first fortress, from which all settlers had mysteriously disappeared.

The inscription "CROATOAN" does not help. The word refers to the name of an Indian village, where, however, there was no trace of the colonists.

# Early Reports: Roanoke Colony and John White's Drawings

Roanoke Colony was located on a small island off the coast of what is now North Carolina. The local Native American tribe, the Secotans, lived in villages and practised agriculture. John White had produced a number of coloured drawings according to which engravings of Theodore de Bry were made. These drawings are precise in details, but the general shapes and postures of the Native Americans are highly stylized. A comparative study has shown that White made no considerable difference between the postures of imaginary characters like Ancient Britons or Picts and those of the Indians. Idealization of Native Americans (models are Ancient Greek statues) is a tool of their control by the colonial power and culture.



White's imaginary drawing of a Pictish woman warrior



White's drawing of a Secotan warrior



White's drawing of a Secotan village: buildings, agriculture, eating habits, religion



# Jamestown: First Permanent English Colony (1607)

## John Smith

Captain John Smith (1580-1631) was a mercenary.

- He served under the French king Henri IV, then **fought the Turks in Transylvania and other parts of the Balkans**, was captured and travelled through **Russia to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth** back to England.
- In 1606 he joined the expedition which had to **establish a permanent colony in Virginia**. On board the ship he was **arrested for mutiny** and had to be hanged, but was **released on the order of the Virginia Company**, which was financing the expedition.
- As a soldier **trained in techniques of survival** he was **indispensable to the colonists** during the hard first years of the colony when the colonists **were decimated by famine and threatened by Native American attacks**. In 1609 Smith was injured by gunpowder explosion and had to return to England.
- In 1614 he returned to America and **explored the coast of Maine and the Massachusetts Bay**. His map of New England and *A Description of New England* (1616) were important for further expeditions (The Pilgrims).





# John Smith: *The General History of Virginia*

*The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* (1624) was the most important publication of Captain John Smith.

- Reveals **sombre aspects of colonization**,
  - the laziness and bad habits of the colonists,
  - their failure to produce food (Smith is credited with saying: "Who shall not work, shall not eat.")
  - their attempts to cheat Native Americans in order to procure food and other commodities.
- Read between the lines, the book shows that there was a **permanent misunderstanding between the colonists and the Indians**, whose reactions were **most often interpreted as expressions of benevolent acceptance of the colonists' supremacy**.

The notorious case is the **partially invented story** of the **rescue of Smith and the whole colony by Pocahontas** (actually Matoaka), the daughter of the Indian chief Powhatan. The truth is that **Pocahontas was captured by the colonists**, baptized (named Rebecca) and **forced to marry John Rolfe**, a tobacco planter. She died in England and the circumstances of her death have not been clarified. Her invented romance was exploited in popular culture (Walt Disney).



**Left:** John Smith's alleged heroism: capture of an Indian chief.  
**Right:** John Smith as a captive led to the Indian village Orapac



# The Legend of Pocahontas: A Symbol of Native American Submission

In Indian captivity, **John Smith's head had to be smashed with clubs**, when, all of a sudden:

Pocahontas, the King's dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevail, got his head in her arms and laid her own upon his to save him from death.

This almost miraculous rescue allows **further idealization of Pocahontas as an angel** sent by God to save the colonists from starvation:

Thus from numb death our good God sent relief,  
The sweet assuager of all other grief.

Significantly, **the style of Smith's narrative changes** from a dry, impersonal prose (where Smith refers to himself in third person) **to emotional verse**.

Pocahontas thus becomes not only a **personification of (non-existent) Indian submissiveness**, but also of **the fertility of the land, and of divine mercy bestowed on the colonizers**.



Above: rescuing John Smith; Pocahontas in England. Below: Pocahontas' baptism; Disney movie



# William Bradford: *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1630-46)

Bradford's chronicle constructs the collective experience of a dissenting Puritan group and transforms it into a general myth which gives a clear religious purpose to the colonization of America.

It is different from the first account of the successful expedition of The Pilgrims to Massachusetts in 1620, *Mourt's Relation* (1622), describing the events since the arrival of the Mayflower to Cape Cod "in a mostly matter-of-fact tone and with a good deal of concrete detail" (Sacvan Bercovitch). It

- gives only stylized descriptions of American scenes and encounters with Native Americans.
- describes America as a "hideous and desolate wilderness that is savage and uninhabitable." In this respect it differs from other reports, emphasizing the advantages of colonization.
- underlines the resemblance between the Old Testament narrative of the wandering of the Jews from Egypt through the inhospitable deserts to the land of Canaan.
- stresses the otherness of America, its absolute difference from Europe, as well as the general presence of evil powers.
- asserts the unconditional right of the Pilgrims to their new land
- puts an emphasis on similarities between some of the adventures of the Pilgrims and the events recorded in the Scripture – a typological approach (historical events "prefigured" in the Bible, New Testament events in the Old Testament).



*...of the first Thanksgiving*  
...and Judgments their unto; the which  
...I must beginne at the very roote, and  
...I have endeavoured to manifest in a plain  
...regard unto the simple truth in all things  
...as my tender judgment can obtaine.

Chapter  
...of godly, and judicious; how ever since  
...lighte of the gospell in our Honourable  
...was firste of nations, whom the Lord  
...single darkness of popery which had covered  
...the world; what wars, & oppressions  
...maintained, and continued against the  
...time, in one sorte, or other. Some times by  
...ments; other whiles by imprisonments, banish-  
...mentes. As being leath his kingdom should  
...be; and the Turches of god reverteth to the  
...reouer, their primitive order, liber-  
...could not prevail by these means, against  
...gospell; but that they began to take rooting  
...of watered with the blood of the martyres,  
...in with a gracious increase. He then be-  
...anciente Strategemes, wick of old against  
...that when by the bloody, & barbarous per-  
...Emperours, he could not slay, & subvert  
...; but that it speedily overspread, with  
...tic, the then best known parts of the world  
...low Errors, heresies, and wondrous  
...professours them selves (working upon  
...other corrupt passions, Incited to  
...of saints them selves in some measure  
...followed, as not only bitter contentions,  
...with other horrible confusions. But  
...advantage they by to fight in a number  
...th many unprofitable Cannons, & decrees  
...as many, to many sports, & pleasures.  
...So as in the anciente times, the persecu-

The first Thanksgiving 1621: the Puritan generosity and the inferiority of Native Americans; the first page of Bradford's MS.



# Other Important Sources from the Beginning of Colonization

## Thomas Morton, *The New English Canaan* (1637)

Describes a **conflict between the Puritans of Salem (north of Boston), led by John Endicott, and the Cavalier colony at “Merrymount”** (actually Wollaston, near Quincy, MA). The conflict was caused by the **religious intolerance of the Puritans**, who destroyed the colony practising English May Day customs (dancing round the Maypole) along with Native American rituals. Morton was an educated lawyer and social reformer and his followers were the Cavaliers, supporters of King Charles I.

## Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (1643)

The first account of Native American languages in English based on the author’s **interaction with the Narragansett and Wampanoag tribes**. After his expulsion from the Puritan Massachusetts Bay colony, Williams founded **Providence Plantations** (1636) - nowadays’ the state of Rhode Island, which became the place of religious tolerance.



**Above:** Consecration of the Lord and Lady of May at Merrymount

**Below:** Roger Williams and Narragansett Indians