

1 Beyond the Seas

Nearly 400 years ago, in the royal courts of Europe, in the baronial castles, in the marketplaces of country towns, and at wayside taverns, people were listening to strange and wonderful stories. More exciting than the legends that Marco Polo had brought from the distant East, these stories told of a New World to the west, on the other side of their planet Earth, which they learned was wondrously round. No discovery like this had ever occurred. All other new lands had been attached to the vast Euro-Asian-African landmass then known to exist.

A great many Europeans could get to the Americas, and they did. They sailed the turbulent Atlantic in ships as light as 50 tons and some just 40 feet long. Their sea voyages were full of peril and fears of the unknown. The voyages lasted from eight to ten weeks without sight of land or communication with the Old World they had left. Such voyages to the New World required a courage bred in faith and sustained by the thrill of adventure and the hope of making a new start in life. Such faith and courage inspired both men and women.

The English were almost foolhardy in their courage and their spirit of adventure. They knew the shores of North America were inhabited by strange humans whom they regarded as dangerous savages. The land was 3,500 miles from the protecting power of England, and they feared their settlements would be discovered and perhaps wiped out by hostile Spaniards. Spain was the greatest naval and colonial power of the period. It had a large settlement in Florida.

Many men and women suffered or died in the first serious English effort to start the conquest of a large part of the North American continent by the slow process of agriculture, industry, and trade. The colonization effort called for heroic efforts and many sacrifices. The hardships of the first colony in 1585 and 1586 and the disappearance of the Lost Colony on Roanoke Island in 1587 helped teach the English the practical difficulties of settling this new land and enabled them to grow in colonial wisdom. The birth of Virginia Dare on August 18, 1587, the first child of English parentage to be born in the New World, symbolized the hope of establishing a new English-speaking nation beyond the seas.

Recalling Facts

1. Europeans sailed the Atlantic in ships as light as
 - a. 20 tons.
 - b. 50 tons.
 - c. 80 tons.
2. Voyages to the New World sometimes lasted
 - a. three weeks.
 - b. six weeks.
 - c. ten weeks.
3. The greatest naval power in the 1500s was
 - a. England.
 - b. Spain.
 - c. Portugal.
4. The Lost Colony disappeared during the late
 - a. 1580s.
 - b. 1620s.
 - c. 1660s.
5. The author describes the English voyagers as
 - a. almost foolhardy.
 - b. deeply religious.
 - c. very patriotic.

Understanding the Passage

6. Most Europeans traveled to the New World to
 - a. escape religious persecution.
 - b. search for a new passage to the Orient.
 - c. begin new lives in a new land.
7. The discovery of America was spectacular because it was
 - a. a land of riches.
 - b. a separate continent.
 - c. found by accident.
8. The "strange and wonderful stories" told 400 years ago
 - a. appealed mostly to men of science.
 - b. concerned Marco Polo's trip to China.
 - c. were about the Americas.
9. Virginia Dare was the
 - a. first English woman to travel to the New World.
 - b. wife of Roanoke Island's first governor.
 - c. first English child born in America.
10. To the English, the disappearance of the Lost Colony was
 - a. the worst tragedy in colonial history.
 - b. a lesson for future settlers.
 - c. the result of fear and ignorance.