

groups and strong evidence exists that neighboring tribes maintained extensive and formal relations — both friendly and hostile.

THE FIRST EUROPEANS

The first Europeans to arrive in North America — at least the first for whom there is solid evidence — were Norse, traveling west from Greenland, where Erik the Red had founded a settlement around the year 985. In 1001 his son Leif is thought to have explored the northeast coast of what is now Canada and spent at least one winter there.

While Norse sagas suggest that Viking sailors explored the Atlantic coast of North America down as far as the Bahamas, such claims remain unproven. In 1963, however, the ruins of some Norse houses dating from that era were discovered at L'Anse-aux-Meadows in northern Newfoundland, thus supporting at least some of the saga claims.

In 1497, just five years after Christopher Columbus landed in the Caribbean looking for a western route to Asia, a Venetian sailor named John Cabot arrived in Newfoundland on a mission for the British king. Although quickly forgotten, Cabot's journey was later to provide the basis for British claims to North America. It also opened the way to the rich fishing grounds off George's Banks, to which European fishermen, particularly the Portuguese, were soon making regular visits.

Columbus never saw the mainland of the future United States, but the first explorations of it were launched from the Spanish possessions that he helped establish. The first of these took place in 1513 when a group of men under Juan Ponce de León landed on the Florida coast near the present city of St. Augustine.

With the conquest of Mexico in 1522, the Spanish further solidified their position in the Western Hemisphere. The ensuing discoveries added to Europe's knowledge of what was now named America — after the Italian Amerigo Vespucci, who wrote a widely popular account of his voyages to a "New World." By 1529 reliable maps of the Atlantic coastline from Labrador to Tierra del Fuego had been drawn up, although it would take more than another century before hope of discovering a "Northwest Passage" to Asia would be completely abandoned.

Among the most significant early Spanish explorations was that of Hernando De Soto, a veteran conquistador who had accompanied Francisco Pizarro in the conquest of Peru. Leaving Havana in 1539, De Soto's expedition landed in Florida and ranged through the southeastern United States as far as the Mississippi River in search of riches.

Another Spaniard, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, set out from Mexico in 1540 in search of the mythical Seven Cities of Cibola. Coronado's travels took him to the Grand Canyon and Kansas, but

failed to reveal the gold or treasure his men sought. However, his party did leave the peoples of the region a remarkable, if unintended, gift: Enough of his horses escaped to transform life on the Great Plains. Within a few generations, the Plains Indians had become masters of horsemanship, greatly expanding the range of their activities.

While the Spanish were pushing up from the south, the northern portion of the present-day United States was slowly being revealed through the journeys of men such as Giovanni da Verrazano. A Florentine who sailed for the French, Verrazano made landfall in North Carolina in 1524, then sailed north along the Atlantic Coast past what is now New York harbor.

A decade later, the Frenchman Jacques Cartier set sail with the hope — like the other Europeans before him — of finding a sea passage to Asia. Cartier's expeditions along the St. Lawrence River laid the foundation for the French claims to North America, which were to last until 1763.

Following the collapse of their first Quebec colony in the 1540s, French Huguenots attempted to settle the northern coast of Florida two decades later. The Spanish, viewing the French as a threat to their trade route along the Gulf Stream, destroyed the colony in 1565. Ironically, the leader of the Spanish forces, Pedro Menéndez, would soon establish a town not far away — St. Augustine. It was the first permanent

European settlement in what would become the United States.

The great wealth that poured into Spain from the colonies in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Peru provoked great interest on the part of the other European powers. Emerging maritime nations such as England, drawn in part by Francis Drake's successful raids on Spanish treasure ships, began to take an interest in the New World.

In 1578 Humphrey Gilbert, the author of a treatise on the search for the Northwest Passage, received a patent from Queen Elizabeth to colonize the "heathen and barbarous landes" in the New World that other European nations had not yet claimed. It would be five years before his efforts could begin. When he was lost at sea, his half-brother, Walter Raleigh, took up the mission.

In 1585 Raleigh established the first British colony in North America, on Roanoke Island off the coast of North Carolina. It was later abandoned, and a second effort two years later also proved a failure. It would be 20 years before the British would try again. This time — at Jamestown in 1607 — the colony would succeed, and North America would enter a new era.

EARLY SETTLEMENTS

The early 1600s saw the beginning of a great tide of emigration from Europe to North America. Spanning more than three centuries, this movement grew from a trickle

of a few hundred English colonists to a flood of millions of newcomers. Impelled by powerful and diverse motivations, they built a new civilization on the northern part of the continent.

The first English immigrants to what is now the United States crossed the Atlantic long after thriving Spanish colonies had been established in Mexico, the West Indies, and South America. Like all early travelers to the New World, they came in small, overcrowded ships. During their six- to 12-week voyages, they lived on meager rations. Many died of disease, ships were often battered by storms, and some were lost at sea.

Most European emigrants left their homelands to escape political oppression, to seek the freedom to practice their religion, or to find opportunities denied them at home. Between 1620 and 1635, economic difficulties swept England. Many people could not find work. Even skilled artisans could earn little more than a bare living. Poor crop yields added to the distress. In addition, the Commercial Revolution had created a burgeoning textile industry, which demanded an ever-increasing supply of wool to keep the looms running. Landlords enclosed farmlands and evicted the peasants in favor of sheep cultivation. Colonial expansion became an outlet for this displaced peasant population.

The colonists' first glimpse of the new land was a vista of dense

woods. The settlers might not have survived had it not been for the help of friendly Indians, who taught them how to grow native plants — pumpkin, squash, beans, and corn. In addition, the vast, virgin forests, extending nearly 2,100 kilometers along the Eastern seaboard, proved a rich source of game and firewood. They also provided abundant raw materials used to build houses, furniture, ships, and profitable items for export.

Although the new continent was remarkably endowed by nature, trade with Europe was vital for articles the settlers could not produce. The coast served the immigrants well. The whole length of shore provided many inlets and harbors. Only two areas — North Carolina and southern New Jersey — lacked harbors for ocean-going vessels.

Majestic rivers — the Kennebec, Hudson, Delaware, Susquehanna, Potomac, and numerous others — linked lands between the coast and the Appalachian Mountains with the sea. Only one river, however, the St. Lawrence — dominated by the French in Canada — offered a water passage to the Great Lakes and the heart of the continent. Dense forests, the resistance of some Indian tribes, and the formidable barrier of the Appalachian Mountains discouraged settlement beyond the coastal plain. Only trappers and traders ventured into the wilderness. For the first hundred years the colonists built their settlements compactly along the coast.

Political considerations influenced many people to move to America. In the 1630s, arbitrary rule by England's Charles I gave impetus to the migration. The subsequent revolt and triumph of Charles' opponents under Oliver Cromwell in the 1640s led many cavaliers — "king's men" — to cast their lot in Virginia. In the German-speaking regions of Europe, the oppressive policies of various petty princes — particularly with regard to religion — and the devastation caused by a long series of wars helped swell the movement to America in the late 17th and 18th centuries.

The journey entailed careful planning and management, as well as considerable expense and risk. Settlers had to be transported nearly 5,000 kilometers across the sea. They needed utensils, clothing, seed, tools, building materials, livestock, arms, and ammunition. In contrast to the colonization policies of other countries and other periods, the emigration from England was not directly sponsored by the government but by private groups of individuals whose chief motive was profit.

JAMESTOWN

The first of the British colonies to take hold in North America was Jamestown. On the basis of a charter which King James I granted to the Virginia (or London) Company, a group of about 100 men set out for the Chesapeake Bay in 1607. Seeking to avoid conflict with the Spanish,

they chose a site about 60 kilometers up the James River from the bay.

Made up of townsmen and adventurers more interested in finding gold than farming, the group was unequipped by temperament or ability to embark upon a completely new life in the wilderness. Among them, Captain John Smith emerged as the dominant figure. Despite quarrels, starvation, and Native-American attacks, his ability to enforce discipline held the little colony together through its first year.

In 1609 Smith returned to England, and in his absence, the colony descended into anarchy. During the winter of 1609-1610, the majority of the colonists succumbed to disease. Only 60 of the original 300 settlers were still alive by May 1610. That same year, the town of Henrico (now Richmond) was established farther up the James River.

It was not long, however, before a development occurred that revolutionized Virginia's economy. In 1612 John Rolfe began cross-breeding imported tobacco seed from the West Indies with native plants and produced a new variety that was pleasing to European taste. The first shipment of this tobacco reached London in 1614. Within a decade it had become Virginia's chief source of revenue.

Prosperity did not come quickly, however, and the death rate from disease and Indian attacks remained extraordinarily high. Between 1607 and 1624 approximately 14,000 people migrated to the colony, yet only