

1

The word "Croatoan" was found carved into a fence post at the abandoned colony, and its presence at the site is one of the most confusing mysteries of Roanoke. Why was it found there? The word "Croatoan" is also connected with other mysterious happenings over the centuries, each one more puzzling than the last. Right before he died, Edgar Allen Poe disappeared for a short time.

When he was seen again, he was delirious. In this final state of delirium before his death, allegedly one of the last words he said was "Croatoan." Poe's official cause of death is unknown, and his medical records and death certificate are lost, so we will never know what happened to him the night that he died.

The word has also appeared at several other famous disappearances in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1888, the stagecoach robber Black Bart carved the word into the wall of his cell before he was released from prison. He was never seen or heard from again. It was found in Amelia Earhart's journal after she disappeared in 1937.

The last bed that horror writer Ambrose Bierce slept in before he disappeared in Mexico in 1913 had the word "Croatoan" carved into one of the posts. In 1921, "Croatoan" was written on the last page of the logbook of the ship *Carroll A. Deering* when it crashed on Cape Hatteras, near Croatoan Island. The ship was missing its entire crew.

#2

In 1607, Captain John Smith tried to uncover what happened at Roanoke. He claimed that Chief Powhatan told him that he killed the people of the colony to retaliate against them for living with another tribe that refused to ally with him. Allegedly, Powhatan showed Smith items he took from Roanoke to support his story, including a musket barrel and a brass mortar and pestle. By 1609, this story reached England, and King James and the Royal Council blamed Powhatan for the missing colonists.

William Strachey seemed to back up the story, confirming the slaughter with his investigation in his work *The Historie of Travaile Into Virginia Britannia*. Powhatan claimed that he ordered the killings because there was a prophecy that he would be conquered and overthrown by people from that area. Contemporary historians and anthropologists dispute this story because there were never any bodies or archaeological evidence found to support the claim, but it has persisted for more than four hundred years.

Recently, author and researcher Brandon Fullam has reexamined Smith and Strachey's sources and has suggested that the Powhatan massacre could have been the 15 settlers left behind from the second expedition, still leaving the mystery of Roanoke unsolved.

Another possible theory is that the Spanish murdered the settlers. England and Spain were in the middle of a war when people of Roanoke disappeared. When the Spanish Armada attacked England in 1588, White was in England trying to organize supplies and find a way back to the colony. All of the country's available ships were commandeered to fight the Spanish, and the war with Spain delayed White's return to the colony with supplies for another three years.

At the time that the settlers disappeared, there were Spanish troops present in Florida. One of the issues that Spain and England went to war over was the colonization of the Americas. There is a theory that Spanish troops secretly traveled north and eliminated the English colony. The Spanish were known for being offensive against other European powers who tried to settle in the Americas. They attacked forts located in South Carolina and Florida throughout the sixteenth century. However, a Spanish attack on Roanoke colony is doubtful. No bodies were ever found, and the Spanish were still looking for Roanoke in 1600, ten years after its colonists went missing. Also, the settlement's fortifications were dismantled when White returned in 1590, indicating an evacuation, not a violent attack.

3

There are two theories about cannibalism: either the people of Roanoke were the victims of cannibals, or they had to resort to it to stay alive. Other Native American tribes were hostile to outsiders, and they weren't on good terms with the settlers or the Croatoans. One of these groups could have been cannibals. There were never any bodies found at the settlement, but that doesn't mean anything. The bones could have been used for healing remedies by grinding them into a powder.

The people of Roanoke could have been picked off gradually, or cannibals could have kidnaped them and disposed of them that way. The fact that no bodies were found sounds like a time-consuming endeavor, but White was gone for three years. If cannibals attacked the settlers, they had more than enough time to dispose of all of the bodies. There is no definitive evidence that any Native American tribes in the area were cannibals, so this is a less likely theory than the people of Roanoke becoming cannibals themselves.

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In 1609, in the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia, the colony had to resort to cannibalism to stay alive. It is possible that the people of Roanoke had to as well. The settlers could have been hungry enough to see cannibalism as a viable option. During the investigations into the disappearance of the settlers, local tribes mentioned that there were internal conflicts in Roanoke before everyone disappeared. The people could have resorted to cannibalism because they were hungry and killed themselves off. An outlandish theory, but an interesting one nonetheless.

#4

Disease is another theory that has much historical basis to support it. The Roanoke colonists could have encountered a New World disease that they had no immunity to fight. The theory goes that the colonists could have caught a good, old-fashioned plague that presented with symptoms of delirium, paranoia, or madness. Considering the reports from Native American tribes in the area of internal warfare in the Roanoke settlement before everyone disappeared, this seems like a viable theory.

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The healthy could have wanted to get rid of those who were sick because they were afraid of getting sick themselves. This easily could have escalated into a violent situation. Once the disease hit, the healthy population could have sectioned off into smaller groups and left the colony, leaving the sick to die.

That certainly could explain the multiple sightings of Europeans in local Indian populations in later years after the colony disappeared. The only problem with this particular theory would be, what happened to the bodies of the sick?

#5

There are two theories involving witchcraft: the Croatoan either executed the colonists as witches, or the colonists were the victims of witches who live in the North Carolina woods.

The Croatoans believed in witches and witchcraft. Their definition of witches were people who used black magic to commit evil acts in everyday life.

While there is no evidence that the Croatoan executed witches, or that the Croatoan accused the people of Roanoke of witchcraft, they were known for condemning dangerous outsiders. They easily could have blamed the people of Roanoke for spreading diseases to which the Croatoan had no immunity.

The Croatoans and other Native American tribes tell legends of witches who live in the North Carolina woods who used black magic to hurt other people. There is a story that the people of Roanoke became the victims of these witches when they left the island, and that is why they were never heard from again.

#6

There have been many supernatural and religious explanations that incorporate Native American belief systems. There is no scientific basis for these theories, but they are still taken very seriously by the Native American populations as explanations on what happened to the missing settlers of Roanoke. They mainly revolve around Native American spirits that help explain away not only the behavior of the colonists before they disappeared, but also why the colonists disappeared without a trace.

Native Americans believe in a wild spirit in the form of a beast called a wendigo. When people resort to eating human flesh, as in the case of cannibalism, their bodies are taken over by a wendigo. If the people of Roanoke resorted to cannibalism, then according to this belief, they are still alive, roaming the woods of North Carolina, in the form of wendigos.

The Croatoan belief system includes a spirit on the island that had the power to absorb humans into the landscape. If the spirit was offended or angered, it would turn people into trees, animals, stones, or any other part of the land. If the colonists were exploiting resources or abusing the land, it could have angered the spirit. This means that the people of Roanoke didn't disappear at all; they were just absorbed into the land.

The Croatoan also believe in the Reptilian Devil of the Woods, an evil spirit that could attach itself to people. This spirit made people violent, greedy, and paranoid. The Croatoan believed that the reptilian spirit had possessed the settlers once they started to turn on each other after White left for England to retrieve more supplies.

#7

From 1937 to 1940, a series of stones were discovered that supposedly tell the story of what happened to the Roanoke colonists. They are called the Dare stones because they were mostly apparently written by John White's daughter, Eleanor Dare. Most historians consider the Dare stones a hoax, although many historians believe the first stone is authentic. In 1937, a tourist found an inscribed stone and brought it to Emory University to be examined for authenticity. Dr. Haywood Pearce, a professor of American history, didn't claim that the stone was authentic, but it didn't contradict what was known at the time.

The inscription was consistent with the phrasing of the time, and the colonists would have had tools to carve such a message. The inscriptions on the stone stated that Eleanor's husband and daughter were dead and asked whoever found the stone to tell her father.

The inscription read:

Ananias Dare &

Virginia Went Hence

Unto Heaven 1591

Anye Englishman Shew

John White Govr Via



The other side of the stone reported that only seven of the Roanoke colonists were left alive, and Native Americans murdered the rest. It was signed EWD (Eleanor White Dare).