



PART I

COLONIZING A NEW WORLD

Before Europeans arrived in North America, the continent had been populated for thousands of years by many Native American tribes. Although several explorers from other countries reached North America before Christopher Columbus, historians often say that American history began with Columbus's four voyages from 1492 to 1504, because it was he who first brought together the "Old World" of Europe, Africa, and Asia and the "New World" of the Americas. The birth of the colonies that eventually became the United States can be traced back to Columbus's discovery.

Nearly a century passed after the voyages of Columbus before anyone showed much interest in the part of North America north of what is now Mexico. During that century the Spanish built their mighty New World empire of New Spain, stretching from modern-day Mexico south through most of South

2 COLONIES AND REVOLUTION

America. By the mid-1500s they were sending shiploads of plundered treasure from conquered Indian empires back to Spain and making that nation the envy of Europe. That envy was one reason some European explorers and adventurers became interested in North America. Others hoped to find a waterway through the landmass that would lead them to the wealth of Asia. Gradually, a few people, especially the English and French, decided to try to establish colonies along the Atlantic shores. After the first English colony at Roanoke in Virginia failed, some courageous settlers managed to start a colony at Jamestown, also in Virginia, in 1607, and another at Plymouth in Massachusetts in 1620.

The settlements at both Jamestown and Plymouth barely survived the first years, which became known as the “starving time”: more than half the colonists died of disease or starvation. But after those first hard years, both colonies gradually prospered, and a growing number of people made the Atlantic crossing to establish more towns and new colonies. By the early 1700s thirteen English colonies were spread along the Atlantic coast.

Christopher Columbus Signs a Contract

A *primary source*, such as this agreement between Christopher Columbus and the rulers of Spain, provides factual information. From this agreement we learn details about his voyages and discoveries. It also offers information on other subjects, including what Columbus was thinking when he took on his greatest adventure. Columbus was well aware of the risks he was taking in sailing west in the hope of reaching China and the Spice Islands. He might easily have been lost at sea or shipwrecked in a hostile land. He wanted to make sure that, if he survived, he would receive adequate rewards. Before Columbus sailed, his patrons, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain, provided him with a document describing the rewards he could expect if he succeeded.



FROM

*An Agreement between Christopher
Columbus and the Rulers of Spain*

APRIL 17, 1492

The things asked for and which your Highnesses grant to Christopher Columbus are as follows:

First, that your Highnesses make, from this time, the said **Don** Christopher Columbus your **Admiral** in all those lands which he shall discover.

Likewise, that your Highnesses make him your **Governor General** in all said lands. . . .

Also, that the said Don Christopher may take the tenth part [10 percent] of all merchandise, whether it be pearls, precious stones, gold, silver, spices, or other things, and give the other nine parts to your Highnesses. . . .

These are **executed** with the responses of your Highnesses in the town of Santa Fe de la Vega de Granada, on the seventeenth of April.

By order of the King and of the Queen

Don is a title of respect, much like "Sir."

admiral: the commander of a fleet of ships.

As **governor general**, Columbus would rule any lands he discovered, second only to the king and queen.

executed: carried out or completed.

Columbus Describes His Voyage

This letter, which Columbus wrote to a friend after his first voyage, describes what he believed he had found. Although he thought he had reached the Indian Ocean, in reality he had explored what are now the Bahamas, Cuba, and Hispaniola. The letter also gives us clues about why all of Europe was thrilled by the news of that voyage. People thought he had found a direct route to the wealth of Asia and had also found people who might be converted to Christianity.

4 COLONIES AND REVOLUTION

Lord Raphael Sanchez was an official in the court of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.

Columbus made three more voyages to the New World. He established a colony but turned out to be a poor governor and treated the people he named "Indians" poorly. He died in 1506, still insisting that the islands he had discovered were just off the coast of China.

pitch: a tar-like substance from pine trees. It was used to make a seal between the boards of a ship for waterproofing.

rhubarb: one of many plants used as medicines.



FROM

*Christopher Columbus's Letter
to Lord Raphael Sanchez*

MARCH 14, 1493

Knowing that it will give you pleasure to learn that I have brought my project to a successful end, I have decided to write you about all the events which occurred on my voyage.

Thirty-three days after my departure, I reached the Indian Sea, where I discovered many islands, thickly populated. I took possession of them in the name of our great King. . . .

In all the islands there is no difference in the physical appearance of the inhabitants or in their manners or language. They all understand each other clearly, a fact which should help our glorious King reach what I assume is his main goal—the conversion of these people to a belief in Christ. . . .

As to the advantages to be gained from my voyage, with a little assistance from our great rulers, I can get them as much gold as they need, as much spice, cotton, and **pitch** as they can use, and as many men for the navy as Their Majesties require. I can bring back **rhubarb** and other kinds of drugs. In fact, I am sure that the men I left in the fort have already found some.

The Mystery of Roanoke

Small numbers of French, Spanish, English, and Portuguese arrived in North America in the 1600s. In 1565 the Spanish established the first permanent settlement in North America, St. Augustine in Florida. In 1584 Queen Elizabeth of England granted Sir Walter Raleigh all of the land he could occupy in what would be called Virginia (after Elizabeth, the