



# Foundation Document Overview

## Fort Raleigh National Historic Site

North Carolina



### Contact Information

For more information about the *Fort Raleigh National Historic Site*, contact: [caha\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:caha_superintendent@nps.gov) or (252) 473-2111 or write to: Superintendent, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, 1401 National Park Drive, Manteo, NC 27954

## Purpose

## Significance and Fundame



*The towne of Roanoke, and true forme of their houses, covered  
and enclosed some w<sup>th</sup> matts, and some w<sup>th</sup> barks of trees. All compassed  
about w<sup>th</sup> small postes stuck thick together in stead of a wall.*

*FORT RALEIGH NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE preserves and interprets the site of the first English Colony in the New World, is the site of the theatrical production, The Lost Colony, and interprets the historical events of the the history of the Native Americans, European Americans, and African Americans who lived on Roanoke Island, North Carolina.*



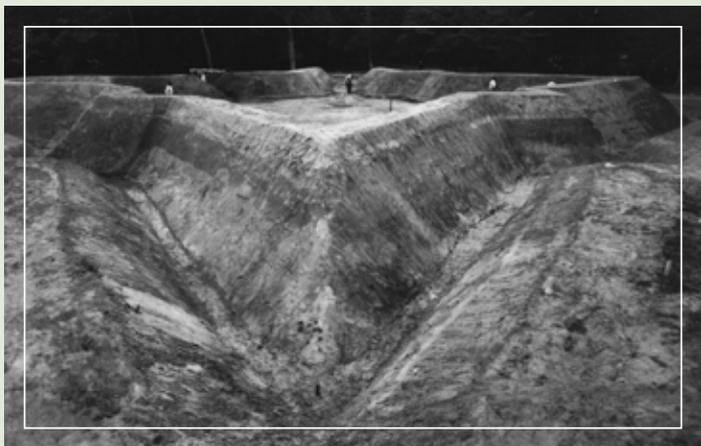
Significance statements express why Fort Raleigh National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The park preserves the site on Roanoke Island where English explorers attempted to create England's first colonial settlement in the New World in 1585–1587.
- Fort Raleigh National Historic Site is the birthplace of Virginia Dare, the first English child born in the New World.
- Fort Raleigh National Historic Site preserves archeological evidence of the first English colonization efforts, and supports research on the history and archeology of the historic site and the associated peoples and events to reveal information on the Roanoke voyages and resolve the mystery of the lost colony of 1587.
- The park is the site of the first sustained interaction between Native Americans and the English, which resulted in the first written cultural/ethnographic information of the Algonquian people of the North Carolina coastal region.
- The park is home to the theatrical production, *The Lost Colony*, the nation's first and longest running outdoor symphonic drama, produced and performed by Roanoke Island Historical Association since 1937, on the very site of the first English colony in the New World.
- Fort Raleigh National Historic Site interprets the Civil War Battle of Roanoke Island and the Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, a refuge established for and built by 3,500 former slaves during and after the U.S. Civil War until 1867.
- The park interprets early wireless radio experiments performed by Reginald Fessenden on the north end of Roanoke Island between 1901 and 1902, including the first clear, usable wireless transmission and reception.

## Natural Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Earthen Fort**
- **Waterside Theatre and *The Lost Colony* Production**
- **Virginia Dare Monument**
- **History and Archeological Resources**
- **Museum Collections and Archival Materials**



Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The 16th-century voyages to Roanoke Island, and the associated human losses, were among England’s first steps, and failures, in the European race to increase power and wealth by capitalizing on the unknown resources of the New World in hopes of determining the course of Europe’s political and economic power.

## Interpretive Themes

- The Carolina Algonquian, a unique and viable culture that had existed for nearly 1,000 years, fell victim to both intended and unintended impacts of the European race to capitalize on the New World, to the point that the culture and its people were eventually extirpated except for archeological evidence and Roanoke voyages-related narrative, ethnography, and art.
- *The Lost Colony*, nurtured and treasured by the people of Roanoke Island since its inception, has endured as a dramatic commemoration of the Roanoke voyages and as the nation’s longest-running outdoor symphonic drama.
- The Roanoke Island Freedmen’s Colony was a living classroom designed to prepare former slaves for a new life of freedom, independence, self-governance, and integration into European-style community living.
- As Civil War battles and activities associated with command of eastern North Carolina encroached upon the Outer Banks, the physical and philosophical isolation initially provided by the remoteness of Roanoke Island was broken, and the lives and livelihood of the people of Roanoke Island were impacted by military presence and control.
- The large low-lying expanse of water and land and the childhood dream of voice over the air brought Reginald Fessenden to Roanoke Island, where, with perseverance and original experimentation, this inventive pioneer achieved his goal of clear, usable wireless transmission and reception; what he did here changed the world forever.
- The natural systems and processes of Roanoke Island, as the “mother vine” from which the island’s culture and stories grew, greatly impacted human success or failure here.
- Tangible evidence unearthed through archeology serves as connections to the stories of past cultures and peoples of Roanoke Island, helps us more accurately place pieces in the park’s multiple puzzles, and provides hope in the resolution of long-standing mysteries.
- Preservation and stewardship of Fort Raleigh National Historic Site’s natural and cultural resources is critical so that future generations can access, enjoy, value, and learn from these valued resources.

# Description

Fort Raleigh National Historic Site is located on the northern end of Roanoke Island, an island sitting in the Roanoke Sound west of the chain of barrier islands of North Carolina known as the Outer Banks. Fort Raleigh National Historic Site is just a few miles north of the town of Manteo, North Carolina. The park manages 355 acres within an authorized boundary of 513 acres.

The State of North Carolina deeded Fort Raleigh State Park to the United States on July 14, 1939, contingent upon its approval by Assistant Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman. The secretarial order of April 5, 1941, established Fort Raleigh National Historic Site to preserve land declared to be of national significance as a portion of the colonial settlement or settlements established in America by Sir Walter Raleigh between 1585 and 1591 (today understood to be 1585–1587). The order also recognized the agreement made between the Roanoke Island Historical Association and the United States for the annual presentation of Paul Green's symphonic drama, *The Lost Colony*, in the open-air amphitheater at the national historic site. *The Lost Colony* is a dramatic commemoration of the stories of England's first attempted settlement in America. The National Park Service owns and maintains the amphitheater and support facilities associated with the production. The drama is entirely managed and produced by the Roanoke Island Historical Association,

the National Park Service's principal partner in this continuing endeavor since the establishment of Fort Raleigh National Historic Site in 1941.

The secretarial order of January 3, 1952, added two parcels to Fort Raleigh National Historic Site. On August 17, 1961, Public Law 87-148 added 125 acres and expanded the interpretive and archeological research missions of the park. On November 16, 1990, congressional legislation (Public Law 101-603) further expanded the authorized park boundary to include an additional 335 acres, of which approximately 202 acres have been acquired by the park. The 1990 act also broadened the purpose of the national historic site to include preservation and interpretation of the first English colony in the New World and the history of the Native Americans, European Americans, and African Americans who lived on Roanoke Island, North Carolina.

In addition to visitor areas and park administrative facilities for Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, the park also includes the headquarters for the NPS Outer Banks Group, which manages Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, and Wright Brothers National Memorial; two "Significant Natural Heritage Areas," and the Elizabethan Gardens. The Elizabethan Gardens, an internationally known botanical garden, is on

private land surrounded on three sides by Fort Raleigh National Historic Site.

Approximately 300,000 visitors come to Fort Raleigh National Historic Site each year. Visitors can engage with the park's history and resources through interpretive programs, walking trails with interpretive wayside exhibits, view and learn about the reconstructed earthen fort, and visit the park visitor center and its exhibits displaying historical and archeological artifacts.

