The Roanoke Island colony, the first English settlement in the New World, was founded by English explorer Sir Walter Raleigh in August 1585. The first Roanoke colonists did not fare well, suffering from dwindling food supplies and Indian attacks, and in 1586 they returned to England aboard a ship captained by Sir Francis Drake. In 1587, Raleigh sent out another group of 100 colonists under John White. White returned to England to procure more supplies, but the war with Spain delayed his return to Roanoke. By the time he finally returned in August 1590, everyone had vanished. To this day, Historians do not have a solid answer on what happened to the colonists, one theory is that the colonists built a boat and sailed back to England, but never made it home to tell their tale.

The Colonists were having a hard time at Roanoke, and because of that they wanted to try to get back home. According to John White’s journal, when he returned he found that the houses that were built had been taken apart. This shows that the colonists had a need for the wood, which they may have used to build a boat. The colonists were also suffering from the worst drought that the area of Roanoke had ever seen in 800 years (College of William and Mary). There were fires starting because of the dryness of the land and John White tells us in his Journal that plants and trees were so dry that the looked burnt by the sun (John White’s Attempt to Rescue the Roanoke Colonists). This means that the colonists were unable to grow crops and find drinking water, which means that they may have been starving and thirsty. The colonists were left with little choice that to try and make it back to England alive. Most likely the colonists were not forced to leave. According to John White’s journal, he says that the colonists were to leave a signal if they were forced to leave against their will. This would have been either by Native Americans or the Spanish. The signal was not found by John White when he returned to the colony. Because there were no signs of violence and the signal was not left, the colonists chose to leave on their own to save their lives. After the colonists built their boats from the wood from the houses, they tried to sail back to England. It is known that they never made it back. Most likely, the colonists died fairly quickly at sea. When John White returned from his trip to England in three professionally made boats, he describes how one ship was tipped over and destroyed just off the coast while it was being sailed. Since a professionally made boat with a trained crew and captain was destroyed by the water and people died, it is likely that the colonists suffered the same fate.

With all this evidence, it is hard to believe that anything else could have happened to the colonists. If they had been slaughtered by the natives, there would have been blood and bodies, but none was found. If they had relocated in North America, John White may have found them and if he didn’t, Historians and others would have found a trace. This leave the option that the colonists left the continent all together. However, they never made it home.