Q  Professor Dial, what happened to the Lost Colony? Did it really disappear without a trace?
A  No. There is overwhelming evidence that after the colonists were left on their own and possibly faced starvation, they joined friendly Indians and eventually intermarried with them. Those Indians, now called the Lumbees, are centered in what is now southeastern North Carolina. Very strong oral traditions handed down from one generation to the next holds that the Lumbees are the colonist’s descendants.

Q  What evidence is there of that?
A  For one thing, the Englishmen who returned to the site of the abandoned colony on Roanoke Island found the word CROATOAN carved in wood. The colony’s returning governor, John White, took that as a sign the group had moved to an Indian area called Croatan, which was occupied by the Hatteras Indians, who are ancestors of the Lumbees. The notion seemed to be in keeping with a plan to move that White had discussed with the colonists three years earlier. White was not unduly concerned about the group’s safety, but he was unable to locate them before a storm forced him to leave.

Q  Were there contacts between the Lumbees and any other early settlers?
A  Yes. An adventurous man named Morgan Jones claimed to have walked across the Carolinas in the 1660’s, and he said he was captured and then befriended by Indians who spoke English. His description of the area sounds like Robeson County, N.C., the heart of the Lumbee settlement. Then when the first big wave of Scottish immigrants reached the Cape Fear Valley in the 1730’s, they were astonished to find a group of English-speaking people already living there in European-style houses and tilling the soil in the European fashion. Many of them were blue-eyed and light-haired.

Q  What happened to the language?
A  They had apparently integrated so completely that, even though they continued to prize the Indian part of their heritage, they passed along the English language in the form that was spoken in the 16th century.

Nearly 100 years ago, historian Stephen Weeks studies this Robeson County group and was struck by their extraordinary old speech patterns. He noted that they began telling the old traditions this way: “Mon (man), my fayther told me that his fayther told him . . . .”
Q If all this has been known so long, why is there still a widespread idea that the Lost Colony was wiped out?

A It suits the purpose of some romantics who are more intrigued by a supposedly unsolved mystery than the facts. The legend defies the findings of travelers and historians who have been saying for hundreds of years that the descendants of the lost colonists were alive and well in North Carolina.

Q Are there any clues as to what happened to Virginia Dare, the first English baby born in America?

A Yes. The oral traditions are clear that her family survived and that the Dials around here may be her descendants. Even today, if you pronounce Dare with a Southern accent, it sounds very much like Dial. And I believe that I am a descendant of Virginia Dare, too.

QUESTIONS:

1. What theory does Professor Dial give for the survival of the Roanoke colonists?

2. What evidence does Professor Dial give to support his theory?

3. In addition to Dial’s explanation, how else could you explain the European tendencies of the Lumbee Indians?

4. Why might the Lumbee’s have found it beneficial to adopt European customs?

5. Why might Professor Dial’s theory never be proven?