This is a discussion of the first SETTLEMENTS, with "first arrivals"—meaning Europeans who cross the Atlantic, disembark on land unsettled by Europeans, find a suitable site, and begin to build with the intention of staying, not merely exploring.

* ISABELLA was a small town that Columbus ordered his men to build on the northeastern shore of Hispaniola (in present-day Dominican Republic) during his second voyage to the New World in 1493. Hunger and disease soon led to mutiny, punishment, disillusion, and more hunger and disease. Isabella barely survived until 1496 when Columbus ordered a new town built on the island as the Spanish capital (now Santo Domingo). Isabella was the "first of the Indies," declares Antonio de Herrera, the seventeenth-century historian who compiled this history of early New Spain from state archives.  
  [Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los Castellanos en las islas y tierra firme del Mar Oceano* (*General History of the Deeds of the Castilians on the Islands and Mainland of the Ocean Sea*), Madrid, 1601-1615]
* JAMESTOWN is justifiably called "the first permanent English settlement" in the New World—a hard-won designation. As historian Alan Taylor recounts, of the first 104 colonists who landed in April 1607, only thirty-eight survived the winter. Of the 10,000 who left England for Jamestown in its first fifteen years, only twenty percent were still alive, and still in Jamestown, in 1622. The first months of the colony were chronicled by John Smith, Edward Wingfield, and in this selection by George Percy, who twice served as the colony's governor. After writing several accounts to justify his actions as governor, Percy left Jamestown for good in 1612. (John Smith, who also felt compelled to defend his leadership, had left for good in 1609.)  
  [George Percy, *Observations Gathered out of a* Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colony in Virginia by the English, 1606, publ. 1608]
* PLYMOUTH. To American schoolchildren of many generations, the term "colonist" spurs images of stalwart Pilgrims setting sail on the *Mayflower* to land at Plymouth Rock—an epic tale of adventure and determination. And it's true. Unlike the single men—the courtiers, soldiers, and adventurers—who built Isabella, Jamestown, and many other early European settlements, the Pilgrims were skilled, hardworking, and self-disciplined. In addition, they settled as *families* for the most part, unique in Atlantic coast settlement at this point. Here we read from the journal of the colony's longtime governor, William Bradford, of the colonists' hard first year after landing in November 1620 to the first harvest in autumn 1621.  
  [William Bradford, History of Plymouth Plantation, written between 1630 and 1647]