

Gans, Joachim ^[1]



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by Gary C. Grassl, 1986

fl. 1581–89

Joachim Gans, mineral expert with the [Ralph Lane](#) ^[2] colony on [Roanoke Island](#) ^[3], 1585–86, and first American [Jewish](#) ^[4] colonist, was born in Prague, Bohemia, possibly the son of or otherwise related to David Gans (1541–1613), Prague chronicler, mathematician, geographer, and astronomer. He appears as Ganz, Gannes, or Gaunse and sometimes his first name is given as Dougham or Doughan; he is also referred to as Master Jochims and Master Yougham. Gans went to England in 1581 to introduce an improved method that he had invented for smelting copper and was employed at the Mines Royal near Keswick, Cumberland. Accompanied by George Nedham, German-speaking shareholder in the mines and agent of [Sir Francis Walsingham](#) ^[5], Gans shortened the time required to refine copper and reduced the cost of production. Afterwards he also worked at Neath near Swansea in south Wales. It undoubtedly was because of his success in these operations that Ganz was selected as the "mineral man" to accompany the Lane colony. [Thomas Harriot](#) ^[6], the scientist on the expedition, reported that the mineral man found both iron and copper. After returning to England with the colony in 1586, Gans lived at one time in the Blackfriars section of London. In 1589 he was arrested in the port city of Bristol as an infidel. During a preliminary hearing he admitted that he was a circumcised Jew who did not believe in the Christian religion, upon which he was taken to London for trial. However, probably because he was known to such important persons as Sir [Walter Raleigh](#) ^[7] and Secretary of State Walsingham, no trial seems to have taken place. There is no record of his burial in the Jewish cemetery of Prague, so it is unlikely that he returned there. The register of St. Andrew's Church, Plymouth, under date of 13 Oct. 1589 notes the marriage of one John Geynes and Alce, whose surname is not recorded; whether Geynes is a form of Gans is, of course, not known.

References:

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Thomas Harriot, *A Brief and true report of the new found land of Virginia* (1588).

David B. Quinn, *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584–1590*, 2 vols. (1955).

Additional Resources:

Archaeology at Fort Raleigh: <https://www.nps.gov/fora/learn/education/unit-7-search-for-the-cittie-of-ralegh.htm> ^[8]

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#),^[13]

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