

FIRST LANDING

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Cape Henry: Spiritual Roots of a Nation

By Craig von Buseck

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But this prophetic moment in time came, in part, as a result of more than half a century of labor and prayer by another Englishman – an Anglican priest who was also one of the world's leading experts on exploration. His name was Richard Hakluyt.

Born in 1552, and orphaned at a young age, Hakluyt became the ward of his older cousin of the same name. The elder Richard Hakluyt was a lawyer and a noted geographer who helped pave the way for the lad to become a Queen's Scholar at Westminster school.

While there, Hakluyt visited his elder cousin, who had a passion for navigation and cosmography. As young Richard explored the home, he discovered books and maps lying open in the study. The elder Hakluyt noticed his interest and began explaining the ways of exploration – opening the eyes of the younger to the exciting study of ocean travel and worldwide exploration

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His enthusiasm for “certain books of cosmography ... and the Bible” so enthralled the younger Hakluyt that he determined to “prosecute that knowledge, and kind of literature.” Enrolling at Christ Church in Oxford, “his exercises of duty first performed,” he spent the rest of his time pursuing his new-found interest in exploration – a passion that would hold his interest for the rest of his life.

His other passion was the Word of God and the Church.

Young Richard Hakluyt earned his master’s degree from Oxford and became both an Anglican priest and one of England’s foremost experts in geography. He read all the accounts he could find of both foreign and English explorations. He interviewed numerous sea captains and sailors – especially those who had been to the New World – and published his research in books that quickly became immensely popular.

Over time, he began to realize the importance of a permanent English settlement in the New World. In 1497, John Cabot discovered and claimed North America for England. But no permanent colony had been established and the continent was being explored and settled by the Spanish and the French. At the same

time, the Spanish had established a vast and prosperous empire throughout South America, Central America, Florida, Cuba, and the Philippines.

The aggressive Spanish King continually threatened an invasion of England – and had the plundered wealth of the New World with which to carry out his threat. Hakluyt knew that in order for Protestant England to be preserved, the strength of the nation needed to expand beyond the relatively tiny British Isles.

Richard Hakluyt set out on a lifelong quest to see the vast North American continent explored, settled, and by God's grace, evangelized by the English people.

In 1583, Hakluyt wrote a passionate and eloquent plea, the *Discourse Concerning Westerne Planting*, calling for the commitment of Queen Elizabeth and the government to approve English settlements in the New World. More than any other person in that time, Richard Hakluyt prepared the public mind for action on colonization.

“Preacher Hakluyt,” as he was known by friends, gathered the world's most comprehensive collection of maps and information concerning this land called Virginia. He wrote extensively on the subject and argued his case before Queen Elizabeth I. Ironically, the queen was so focused on the threat of war from Spain that for some time she would not allow herself to consider Hakluyt's arguments.

In 1578, she was finally persuaded and granted a private patent to Sir Humphrey Gilbert, the brother of Sir Walter Raleigh – the man who named the vast territory Virginia in her honor. But Gilbert died when his ship sank off the coast of Newfoundland in 1583. Elizabeth then granted a patent to Raleigh, who sponsored five expeditions to Roanoke Island in modern-day North Carolina.

All of the Raleigh expeditions ended in failure. The final tragedy became known as the ‘lost colony’ of Roanoke – 110 men, women, and children who mysteriously disappeared without a trace. When King James came to the throne, Raleigh lost favor and eventually was imprisoned and executed.

Richard Hakluyt sensed that the time was right to once again make his case before the royal court. He gathered a group of like-minded merchants and explorers to form the Virginia Company. The group received an audience with King James I, a serious and scholarly monarch, committed to the Christian faith and the future of the newly united kingdom.

The new king looked favorably upon their request and worked with the Virginia Company to draft a charter for the endeavor. The chief writer for the charter was Richard Hakluyt.

Amidst the language of the original charter from King James for Virginia was a declaration of the spiritual aspect of the venture:

We greatly commend and graciously accept their desires for the furtherance of so noble a work, which may, by the providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the glory of His Divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God and may in time bring the infidels and savages living in those parts to human civility and a settled, quiet government.

Along with the expansion of the kingdom, and the search for natural resources and gold to build the empire, a major aspect of the stated mission of the Virginia Company included concern for spiritual things. This priority was presented in a tract published by the group titled, 'A True Declaration of the State of Virginia':

First, to preach and baptize into Christian religion and by the propagation of the Gospel, to recover out of the arms of the devil a number of poor and miserable souls wrapped up into death in almost invincible ignorance; to endeavor the fulfilling and accomplishments of the number of the elect which shall be gathered from out of all corners of the earth; and to add to our myte the treasury of heaven.

The British saw this missionary aspect of the endeavor as a way to extend to others the same gospel message that came to them. In the days of Roman conquest, the native Britons were a group of loosely-organized tribes, similar to the Native American peoples. The civilizing effect of Roman law and later Christian religion had lifted the British people and made them a mighty nation.

“Why, what injury can it be to people of any nation for Christians to come unto their ports, havens, or territories,” wrote colonist William Strachey, “when the law of nations, which is the law of God and man, doth privilege all men to do so?” The Virginia colonists were doing for the natives what others had done for them centuries before.

On December 20, 1605, 105 settlers and 40 seamen set out from the river Thames in England in three small wooden vessels – the Susan Constant, the Godspeed, and the Discovery. Richard Hakluyt would not realize his dream of seeing Virginia. He was too old and too valuable of an advisor to the king to allow on the perilous journey. Instead, his dear friend, Rev. Robert Hunt, would join the expedition as the spiritual leader.

After a difficult journey, that included the death of one of the colonists in the Caribbean, and the imprisonment of a soldier named Captain John Smith – on dubious charges of mutiny that were later dismissed – many of the colonists had nearly given up hope of ever arriving in the New World. Then on April 26, after enduring a violent thunderstorm that caused the sailors to bring down their sails, the colonists finally saw land in the distance.

They had arrived in Virginia! The ships entered the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay and set anchor just beyond the Atlantic Ocean. They named the place Cape Henry, after James' son, Henry, Prince of Wales.

Before permitting the settlers to continue with the work of looking for a permanent home, Rev. Hunt required that each of the colonists wait on the ships for three days in a time of personal examination and

repentance. The journey had been filled with difficulty and in-fighting among the colonists. If they were to consecrate the land for God's purposes, Hunt wanted the company to be contrite in heart.

Though the ships they sailed upon were very small, The Virginia Company leadership insisted that they carry one item with them from England for the purpose of giving glory to God in the endeavor – a rough-hewn wooden cross. After the three days had passed, Hunt led the party to the wind-swept shore where they erected the seven-foot oak cross in the sand.

The colonists and sailors gathered around the cross, holding the first formal prayer service in Virginia to give thanksgiving for God's mercy and grace in bringing them safely to this new land. As they knelt in the sand, Hunt reminded them of the admonition of the British Royal Council, taken from the Holy Scripture: "Every plantation, which my Heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up."

Raising his hands to heaven, Rev. Robert Hunt claimed the land for country and king and consecrated the continent to the glory of God.

In response to the vision of the two Richard Hakluyt's – a vision that had been adopted by many of these original settlers – Rev. Robert Hunt stood as a representative of the King, the Church, and the people of England, in a sacred moment, and dedicated the new continent to the purpose of God.

This was the first official act by the English in the New World.

In covenantal language he declared, "...from these very shores the Gospel shall go forth to not only this New World, but the entire world."

Jamestown became the first successful and permanent English colony. The first Protestant church services were held there by Robert Hunt under an old sail until the first church building was erected. In Jamestown, colonists came together for prayer three times a day and the church was at the center of the town. It was also

the site of the first representative government in North America, the Virginia General Assembly, which is now the third oldest continuous legislature in the world.

Long before the original settlers landed at Cape Henry, the Holy Spirit was at work through a godly man, preparing the way for a continent to be dedicated to His glory and for His purposes. Of Hakluyt, it has been said, “England is more indebted for its American possession than to any man of that age.”

As Rev. Robert Hunt prayed on that fateful day in April, 1607, their “plantation” was not “rooted up.” From these humble beginnings, and later through other English colonies planted across North America, freedom flourished, allowing for unprecedented prosperity and peace. And by God’s providence, Rev. Hunt’s prayer continues to bear fruit, “...from these very shores the Gospel shall go forth to not only this New World, but the entire world.”

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