

History 101

Sir Walter Raleigh



Sir Walter Raleigh (c. 1554 – 29 October 1618) was an English aristocrat, writer, poet, soldier, courtier, spy, and explorer. He is also well known for popularizing tobacco in England.

Raleigh was born to a Protestant family in Devon, the son of Walter Raleigh and Catherine Champernowne. Little is known for certain of his early life, though he spent some time in Ireland, in Killua Castle, Clonmellon, County Westmeath, taking part in the suppression of rebellions and participating in the Siege of Smerwick. Later he became a landlord of properties confiscated from the Irish rebels. He rose rapidly in Queen Elizabeth I's favor, and was knighted in 1585. He was involved in the early English colonization of Virginia under a royal patent.

Raleigh's plan in 1584 for colonization in the "Colony and Dominion of Virginia" in North America ended in failure at Roanoke Island, but paved the way for subsequent colonies. His voyages were funded primarily by himself and his friends, and never provided the steady stream of revenue necessary to start and maintain a colony in America. In 1587, Raleigh attempted a second expedition, again establishing a settlement on Roanoke Island. This time, a more diverse group of settlers was sent, including some entire families, under the governance of John White. After a short while in America, White was recalled to England to find more supplies for the colony. He was unable to return the following year as planned, however, because the Queen had ordered that all vessels remain at port for potential use against the Spanish Armada. It was not until 1590, 3 years later, that the supply vessel arrived at the colony, only to find that all colonists had disappeared. The only clue to their fate was the word "CROATOAN" and letters "CRO" carved into other tree trunks. Whatever the fate of the settlers, the settlement is now remembered as the "Lost Colony of Roanoke Island".

In 1591, he secretly married Elizabeth Throckmorton, one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, without the Queen's permission, for which he and his wife were sent to the Tower of London. After his release, they retired to his estate at Sherborne, Dorset.

In 1594 Raleigh heard of a "City of Gold" in South America and sailed to find it, publishing an exaggerated account of his experiences in a book that contributed to the legend of "El Dorado". After Queen Elizabeth died in 1603 Raleigh was again imprisoned in the Tower, this time for allegedly being involved in the Main Plot against King James I, who was not favorably disposed toward him. In 1616, he was released to lead a second expedition in search of El Dorado. This was unsuccessful and men under his command ransacked a Spanish outpost. To appease the Spanish, he was arrested and executed in 1618. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Raleigh]

