

First Landing Day

April 29

The Christian Founding of America

We do hereby dedicate this Land, and ourselves, to reach the people within these shores with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Robert Hunt

Introduction

The planting of the first permanent English colony on the shores of North America began on April 26, 1607, when 104 settlers and Parson Robert Hunt landed at Cape Henry in Virginia. Their first official act was to conduct a “Lord’s Day” service. Several days later, on April 29th, they conducted a service and dedicated America to God. This has become the day that we recognize and celebrate as *First Landing Day*. At the original site, now a state park in Virginia Beach, Virginia, was recently renamed *First Landing Park* in honor and recognition of this event.

Most Americans have learned a highly secularized version of the founding of our nation and the Jamestown colony. Most books written for children and adults espouse this same secular or revisionist perspective that leaves out the purposes of God. We need to set the record straight by examining original sources to discover a lost story that is now being retold.

Early Discoverers

Many believe that God reserved America for His purposes. Arnold Guyot, 1800s Princeton professor, recognized: “America, therefore . . . seems destined to furnish the most complete expression of the Christian civilization; and to become the fountain of a new and higher life for all the races of men.”¹ There is considerable evidence that many of the early explorers that came to North America were Christians who wanted to see this land dedicated to God and used for His purposes. One of them was the Irish Christian Brendan. Brendan was a godly man, a bishop, to whom God spoke and called to explore the Western Land, as North America was then called. Historian Jan Bauder relates the following:

For seven summers, Brendan experimented and explored. At last, he sailed the winds and currents and crossed the western Ocean to the Western land. He apparently saw no people, though he explored at what would be Virginia, Plymouth (and elsewhere). He carved Christian symbols in the native rock outcroppings—putting God’s stamp on what would be North America, in 555 A.D. But he was disappointed there was no one to witness to, so God assured him that this trip was not in vain, that this Western Land (the American continent) God had promised to His Saints.²

Brendan, at the age of 70, wrote a book about his voyages, entitled *The Land God Promised to His Saints*. In it, Brendan clearly detailed his travels so that others could repeat what he had done.

The Venetian sailor, John Cabot, heard of the land on the other side of the Western Sea. In 1497, he sailed to a land that he called New Found Land (Newfoundland) with his three sons. Jan Bauder describes their actions:

He landed at a harbor he called St. John's because they arrived on June 24th, St. John's Day, after praying their way through a terrible storm the night before. He and his sons and crew held a Consecration of his newly found land giving it to God and claiming it for England to bring the Good News of Jesus to its native peoples. John's son Sebastian mapped the whole East Coast, from Newfoundland to the Rio Grande.³

Richard Hakluyt

Another little known individual who was mightily used in the founding of our nation was the Englishman Richard Hakluyt. When God called Richard Hakluyt into the ministry, he was in love with a beautiful and wealthy girl. When Richard told her family of his call from God, they responded that there would be no marriage if he chose this career. Hakluyt obeyed the call of God, and the marriage was called off. Hakluyt learned that obedience to God is sometimes very costly!

Richard Hakluyt and his older cousin with the same name were called by God to evangelize and colonize North America. They believed that they were to answer “Yes” to God on behalf of England, Wales and Scotland to work to fulfill the Great Commission in this way. Richard Hakluyt was an Oxford graduate who became very interested in geography and exploration. He conducted scholarly research, compiling the records of all explorers that he could obtain. These were eventually published as *Hakluyt's Voyages, the Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, & Discoveries of the English Nation*. Hakluyt helped form the Virginia Company, which was composed of two parts—the London Company and the Plymouth Company. Their aim was to plant colonies in both the northern and southern parts of Virginia. For his tireless efforts in this work, Hakluyt is known as the “Father of American Colonization.”

Sir Walter Raleigh

Richard Hakluyt's vision was due to be tested, and the person to perform this testing was Walter Raleigh. Raleigh was involved in the occult and was of poor character, choosing worldly ways to conduct his life. The Hakluyts gave Raleigh a proposal for colonizing North America to present to Queen Elizabeth. Raleigh stole their research, wrote and published a book in 1576, and thereby gained the right to plant a colony himself. Raleigh and his half-brother Humphrey had a different motive than the Hakluyts: gold. In God's Providence, none of Raleigh's efforts ever succeeded. Eventually, Raleigh was arrested in the Guy Fawkes plot to murder King James. He was placed in the Tower and could attempt no more new colonies. Thankfully, before his execution, Raleigh repented of his sins and turned to Jesus for salvation.

Francis Drake

One of the explorers that God used for His purposes in America was Sir Francis Drake.

God called Francis Drake, an evangelist—parson's son, to sea life. He apprenticed under a Plymouth ship-master. When that man died he willed Drake his ship. Drake, a born again Christian, never took anybody but born again men on his voyages. He and the English were in a 'cold war' defending themselves from Spain. Holland also was Protestant, both were fighting for their very existence—but England was not strong enough to make a 'hot' war of it.⁴

In 1579, Sir Francis Drake and his chaplain, Francis Fletcher, began a voyage to circumnavigate the world in search of those who still needed to hear the Gospel. They put in at what we now call San Francisco for ship repairs and were surprised at the receptivity of the native peoples to the Gospel. At the end of the three-week stay an amazing thing happened: the native people gave a great feast for Drake and his crew and at the end of the feast they made gestures that they would like to give their land to them! As Jan Bauder remarks, Drake

graciously received it, to evangelize them. Then they erected a cross, put a sixpence on it with Elizabeth's portrait, and a brass plate claiming the land for evangelizing by England. Then, Drake consecrated North America—the whole continent—to God

from the west Coast, similarly to the Cabot's East Coast Consecration. They called the land (continent): Nova Albion—New 'Robed-in-the-Bright-Light-of-Jesus' Righteousness' meaning: New Land of Righteousness.⁵

The Charters of Freedom

Richard Hakluyt, Robert Hunt and other members of the Virginia Company composed the first charter for the colonizing of Virginia. After the charter was written, it was necessary to procure the agreement of King James; James did agree, then attempted to disband Virginia in 1609 and again in 1624, but was finally prevented from doing so. All four charters state that it was the purpose of this endeavor to bring the Gospel to the people who live in darkness. As stated in the 1606 charter:

. . . Wee, greatly commending and graciously accepting of thiere desires to the furtherance of soe noble a worke which may, by the providence of Almightye God, hereafter tende to the glorie of His Divine Majestie in propagating of the Christian religion to suche people as yet live in darknesse and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worshippe of God may in tyme bring the infidels and salvages living in those parts to humane civilitie and to a settled and quiet govrnente, doe by these our letters patents graciously accepte of and agree to their humble and well intended desires;⁶

In this first charter it was also recognized that the Christian faith was to be preached and therefore planted:

. . . and wee doe especially ordaine, charge and require the said Presidents and Councells and the ministers of the said several Colonies respectively, within their several limits and precincts, that they with all diligence, care and respect doe provide that the true word of God and Christian faith be preached, planted and used, not only within every of the said several Colonies and plantacions but alsoe as much as they may amongst the salvage people which doe or shall adjoine unto them, according to the doctrine, rights and religion now professed and established within our realm of England;⁷

The third charter, dated March 12, 1612, opened with a greeting from King James, and then this statement:

Whereas at the humble suite of divers and sundry our lovinge subjects, as well adventurers as planters of the First Colonie in Virginia, and for the propagacion of Christian religion and reclayminge of people barbarous to civilitie and humanitie⁸

The fourth charter, of 1628, contained a section where a college was to be established to teach the infidels the true religion:

And whereas, by a special grant and licence from His Majesty, a general contribution over this realm hath been made for the building and planting of a college for the training up of the children of those infidels in true religion, moral virtue and civility, and for other godly uses, we do, therefore according to a former grant and order, hereby ratifie and confirm and ordain that a convenient place be chosen and set out for the planting of a university at the said Henrico in time to come and that in the mean time preparation be there made for the building of the said college for the children of the infidels⁹

These charters were important in so many ways, not the least being that they gave the colonists the right of self-rule and self-government. You may remember that Thomas Jefferson complained in the Declaration of Independence that the king was a tyrant because he was attempting to take away the charters of the Colonies.

The Jamestown Colony

On December 20, 1606, the London Company colonists left England. Richard Hakluyt was not able to go as their chaplain, but God prepared his secretary Robert Hunt for this job. Virginia Historian M. J. Raeburn noted:

Hunt fully understood the colony's missionary purpose and the need for America to be Dedicated. Thus Hakluyt was glad Hunt would be going. In addition, they would both be interceding for the colony: Hunt in Virginia—America and Hakluyt in England.¹⁰

One of the providential events of the voyage occurred when a storm separated the three ships: the Godspeed, the Discovery and the Susan Constant. Parson Hunt interceded and God graciously answered, bringing them back together. At dawn on April 26th, land was sighted. They named the place Cape Henry in honor of the king's son. Being the Lord's Day there was a worship service and sermon. Pastor Hunt admonished them to forgive each other and come together in Biblical unity. Many of them refused to do so. After being attacked by Indians, with two of them wounded, many were persuaded that God wanted them to let go of their grudges and put behind them any grievances that they had with each other. By Wednesday the 29th there had been many reconciliations and God had prepared their hearts for a dedication service. M. J. Raeburn relates what happened next:

Hunt had a remarkably accurate map of the entire continent of North America, that is, Virginia–America. It went from sea to sea and covered all of what is the USA and Canada today. Its East Coast was carefully mapped by many, starting with Sebastian Cabot; its West Coast was mapped by Sir Francis Drake. King James mentioned northern and southern boundaries more narrowly than was historically necessary, so as not to offend Spain, France or Holland. Even so, the entire continent of North America is included in the Dedication–Canada too, though a separate country from the USA.¹¹

The dedication service was held atop Cape Henry, a huge hill of sand that was over 100 feet tall. Hunt placed his map of Virginia–America on top of the Bible. The sailors appointed for the purpose planted the huge oak cross which would be seen for 300 years by all those on ships entering or leaving the Chesapeake Bay. In the 1930's it was replaced with a stone cross that is there today. This was the prayer of dedication by Robert Hunt:

We do hereby dedicate this Land, and ourselves, to reach the People within these shores with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to raise up Godly generations after us, and with these generations take the Kingdom of God to all the earth.

May this Covenant of Dedication remain to all generations, as long as this earth remains, and may this land, along with England, be Evangelist to the World.

May all who see this Cross, remember what we have done here, and may those who come here to inhabit join us in this Covenant and in this most noble work that the Holy Scriptures may be fulfilled.

Psalm 22:27–28 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to The Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the Kingdom is the Lord's and He is the Governor among the nations.

Let us pray:

Almighty and merciful God, let us never stray from the Commission to which Thou has Called us—to bring the inhabitants of this land to the knowledge of Thy Kingdom. Help us to be bearers of Thy Truth to those who so sorely need to receive it. Hasten the day, Oh God, when the knowledge of Thy Son shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. And even if we should fall short on Thy Calling, Thou shalt stir up our children after us and bestow upon them this blessed Land. Let us add our mite to the Treasury of Heaven. Use us, Oh God, weak instruments as we are, for the building up of Thy Kingdom which shall be gathered from all corners of the earth. Let it be said that God has made His ways known upon the earth and His saving help among the nations.

In the name of our Holy Savior, Amen¹²

Many Firsts

There are many ways that God used those who came to establish the first permanent English settlement in America. In many ways this colony was not perfect, however it is clear that there were many involved who loved the Lord and had godly motives. Reflect for a moment on these ways that God, in His Sovereignty and Providence, used the Virginia settlement at James's City:

- The first free election in the new world took place when Edward Wingfield was chosen President of the Council of Virginia.

- The first trial by jury under English Common Law came to a conclusion when John Smith was acquitted of charges of mutiny. Ten years later, the Virginia General Assembly was established and today is the oldest continuously running, freely elected governing body in the New World.
- The first Thanksgiving services were held at the new City of Henricus and at the Berkley Plantation: “the day of our ships’ arrival . . . shall be yearly and perpetually kept as a day of Thanksgiving.

Celebrate First Landing Day with Your Family!

- Visit First Landing State Park in Virginia Beach, Virginia.
- Reenact the first landing with a play “The Land God Promised to His Saints,” by Jan Bauder.
- Obtain a copy of the original charters and read them aloud.
- Enjoy and perform the skit “America’s Dedication to God” which begins on page 142 of this book.

Endnotes

1. Verna M. Hall, *The Christian History of the Constitution*, Vol. 1: *Christian Self-Government* (San Francisco, CA: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1966), 4
2. Jan Bauder, *The Dedication, Rediscovering America’s Christian History Hidden For Years* (Virginia Beach, VA: Patriot Prints, 2004), 20
3. Ibid, 29
4. Ibid, 41
5. Ibid, 41
6. *The Charters of Virginia 1606–1621* (Virginia Beach, VA: Patriot Prints, 1994), chapter four
7. Ibid, chapter two
8. Ibid, chapter nine
9. Ibid, chapter ten
10. M. J. Raeburn, *America’s Dedication to God Series, Booklet One: Richard Hakluyt’s Contribution* (Virginia Beach, VA: His Story Seminars, 1994), 3
11. Ibid, 4
12. Jan Bauder, *The Dedication, Rediscovering America’s Christian History Hidden For Years*, 63