Richard Hakluyt Encyclopedia Article

Richard Hakluyt

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Richard Hakluyt

c. 1552-1616

English Geographer

Though he never personally took part in any expeditions, Richard Hakluyt greatly advanced the cause of English exploration in North America. One of England's first geographers, he collected and disseminated information, and promoted the colonization efforts of Sir Walter Raleigh (1554-1618) and others.

Hakluyt's father, a skinner in London, was named Richard Hakluyt; so too was his cousin (c. 1535-1591), a geographer who influenced Hakluyt's interest in the subject. Hakluyt attended first Westminster School, then Christ Church, Oxford, where he earned a B.A. in 1575 and an M.A. in 1577. Soon afterward, he was ordained to the priesthood, but continued to study and lecture on geography at Oxford. During this time, he made the acquaintance of Sir Francis Drake (1540?-1596), and sponsored a translation of two accounts of voyages by Jacques Cartier (1491-1557).

The first geographical work by Hakluyt appeared in 1582 as *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America.* The book, which greatly encouraged colonization efforts, contained an account of previous English voyages to North America, a list of America's known resources, and a report on the Northwest Passage. During the following year, Hakluyt promoted an expedition led by Sir Humphrey Gilbert (c. 1539-1583), and began a stint as chaplain to the English ambassador in France. The latter position gave him the opportunity to study French, Portuguese, and Spanish geographical information. In 1584, he visited England long enough to beseech Queen Elizabeth I to encourage the planting of crops in the New World.

The Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation, a history of English overseas exploration, was published in 1589. Hakluyt married soon afterward, and between 1598 and 1600 published a second and greatly expanded version of the book. He died in 1616, the same year as his fellow Englishman William Shakespeare.