

Fall History & Heritage -- #5 (week of October 10)

The following Q&A and commentary come from our *Almanac* and *America* studies as indicated:

Sir Walter Scott -- (*Almanac*, Oct. 4)

The most popular writer of the 19th-century, **this Scotsman (1771--1832)** revived the pride and patriotism of his native land with near single-handedness? He wrote novels, historical fiction, histories and biographies, epic poetry and legends: an outpouring of imaginative creativity seldom equaled. His *Tales of a Scottish Grandfather* (1828) surveyed the factual history of Scotland, not as a professional researcher would, but as a father relating the ways of his people to his son.

James Whistler -- (*Almanac*, Oct. 6)

A native of industrial Lowell, MA, **this portrait painter and etcher (1834--1903)** spent much of his career in Europe and proved one of the most innovative artists of all time? His best known portraits include those of his mother, little ballerina Miss Cicely Alexander, and Scottish scholar Thomas Carlyle. He made generous use of oriental styles and, later in life, turned to interior decoration, observing that "to live in art is a far more biblical notion than to merely pander to the critics and collecting classes."

Bartolome de Las Casas -- (*Bennett's America*, vol. 1, pp. 10-11)

In the 16th-century (1500s), **this Spanish Dominican cleric (priest & bishop)** became the leading advocate for humane treatment of the aboriginal peoples of the Caribbean? He campaigned in both Spain and the Americas against an abusive slave system and an expansive slave trade (though he stopped short of condemning all slavery per se). His writings told the history of Spanish colonial misrule, and his influence shaped legal reforms in the mother country (the "New Laws of the Indies," 1542).

Amerigo Vespucci -- (*America*, vol. 1, p. 14)

The Americas are named after **this early 16th-century Florentine navigator (d. 1512)** who seemed to realize, early on, that Columbus's voyages had made contact not with Asia, but with a New World? His accounts of that world (with all their exaggeration, fantasy, and shameless self-promotion) were published by German mapmaker Martin Waldseemuller in 1507. It was Waldseemuller who attached the Florentine's name to the great landmass across the sea (west and south of Europe).

Francis I -- (*America*, vol. 1, pp. 13-16)

When told that Pope Alexander VI had assigned the unexplored regions of the world to Spain and Portugal in his so-called "Line of Demarcation," **this 16th-century king of France** asked to see Adam's will "to learn how *he* had divided up the world!"? The king saw to it that French claims in North America were initiated by seamen Giovanni da Verrazano (1520s) and Jacques Cartier (1530s). Still, French gains in the New World were meager and disappointing (there was no gold to speak of) till the 1600s.

Death of Magellan -- (*America, vol.1, pp. 18-19*)

A Portuguese nobleman, Ferdinand Magellan became the first mariner to direct a circumnavigation of the earth while sailing for Spain (1519--1522). He himself never made it home, having been slain in the Philippines (east of Indochina or today's Vietnam) in 1521 when his small band tried to aid a tribal king, a fellow professing Christian, against an enemy nearby. According to Italian crew member Antonio Pigafetta, none of the band would have survived had not Magellan, gravely wounded in the process, covered their retreat. Pigafetta eulogized the brave and fierce commander as "our mirror, our light, our comfort and our true guide." With its messianic overtones, high praise indeed.

The Aztecs and the Incas -- (*America, vol.1, pp. 22-23*)

These two advanced empires in today's Mexico & Peru were overcome in the early 1500s by small bands of Spaniards led by the conquistadors Cortes and Pizarro. The Spaniards, to their advantage, were draped in armor and mounted on horses, but the sheer numbers of their foes should have proved sufficient to offset that edge. Perhaps the cunning and cruelty of the Spaniards led to their triumph, although Cortes was aided mightily by other native tribes who looked to him for liberation from imperial oppression.