

Kid Carolina: R. J. Reynolds Jr., a Tobacco Fortune, and the Mysterious Death of a Southern Icon

Heidi Schnakenberg

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The Reynolds tobacco family was an American dynasty like the Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, and Astors. R.J. "Dick" Reynolds Jr. was born into privilege and decadence, but his disastrous personal life eventually destroyed almost every relationship he cherished and stole his health at a relatively young age.

Dick Reynolds was dubbed "Kid Carolina" when as a teenager, he ran away from home and stowed away as part of the crew on a freighter. For the rest of his life he'd turn to the sea, instead of his friends and family, for comfort. Dick disappeared for months at a time, leading the dual life of a business mogul and troubled soul, both of which became legendary.

Despite his personal demons, Dick played a pivotal role in shaping twentieth-century America through his business savvy and politics. He developed Delta and Eastern Airlines, single handedly secured FDR's third term election, and served as mayor of Winston-Salem, where his tobacco fortune was built. Yet below the gilded surface lay a turbulent life of alcoholism, infidelity, and loneliness. His chaotic existence culminated in a surprise fourth marriage and was shortly followed by a strange death, the end of a life every bit as awe-inspiring as it was disturbing.



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