

JOHN CABOT

Five years after Columbus came to America, an Italian living in England had a similar dream. He asked King Henry VII to finance an expedition to find the Northwest Passage. You will remember that Europeans thought there was a waterway through North America directly to the Far East. We know today that such a waterway does exist, but it is far too winding and difficult to be practical.

The person of whom we speak was Giovanni Caboto, an Italian living in Bristol, England. Caboto was born in Genoa, Italy, and had been a merchant in Venice. He moved to England in 1490 and became a wealthy merchant there. Afterwards, he was known as John Cabot. The name John Cabot is the English version of Giovanni Caboto.



King Henry agreed to give Cabot a small ship called the *Matthew*. Its crew of 18 included Cabot's son, Sebastian. The king also gave Cabot a charter to claim any new land he found for the English crown.

Cabot left Bristol, England, on May 2, 1497. He followed a route much farther north than Columbus had five years before. After six weeks at sea, the *Matthew* touched land somewhere off present-day Canada. Cabot had probably reached either Nova Scotia or Newfoundland. He explored this northernmost coast of America, taking it to be China, the land of the Great Khan.

John Cabot returned to England, thinking he had found the northeast coast of Asia. Henry VII was impressed and financed a second expedition. This time Cabot had a fleet of five ships and a crew of 300. Setting sail in May 1498, he crossed the Atlantic and this time explored all the way from Greenland in the north to North Carolina in the south. But, like all the others, he never found the Northwest Passage.

A disappointed John Cabot found no gold or spices, but he did discover the rich cod-fishing grounds off Newfoundland. Much wealth would later pour into England because of this discovery.

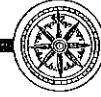
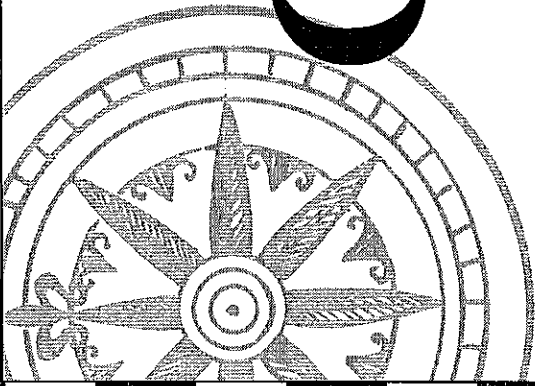
The end of Cabot's second voyage is shrouded in mystery. Historians disagree as to what happened to him. Some maintain that he returned to England and disappeared from history. The more widely accepted belief, however, is that he went down with his ship in a storm off the coast of Newfoundland.

The voyages of John Cabot were important because they gave England claim to the mainland of North America. This claim paved the way for the founding of the English colonies in the early seventeenth century.



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JOHN CABOT

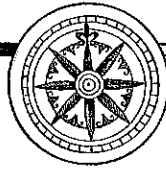


JOHN CABOT

FAST FACTS

- John Cabot was born near Naples, Italy, at about the same time as Christopher Columbus.
- His name in Italian was Giovanni Caboto.
- Cabot lived in Venice for a time, where he married a woman named Mattea. They had three sons: Ludovico, Sebastiano, and Sancio.
- Cabot was living in Bristol, England, in 1492—when Christopher Columbus made his historic voyage to America for Spain.
- When Cabot returned from his first voyage and announced that he had reached Asia, he was called “The Great Admiral.” The king of England paid him a reward.
- Cabot claimed the places he landed for England. This gave the English the right to establish colonies in North America.
- Cabot’s son, Sebastian, was also an explorer. He explored the coast of South America for Portugal.
- Cabot’s son, Sancio, died with him during the unsuccessful voyage of 1498.

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ABOUT JOHN CABOT

Like Spain, England wanted to trade with the Indies. In 1497 England's King Henry hired John Cabot to find a quick route there.

Both Columbus and Cabot figured out they could sail west to reach the Indies. Columbus had already found what he believed were islands off the east coast of China. Cabot's plan was to reach the mainland. He would do this by sailing farther north than Columbus had.

In May 1497, Cabot set sail from Bristol, England. There were 18 people on board his small wooden ship named the *Matthew*. Sailing ships depend upon the wind to move them across the water. Farther south, the wind tends to blow westward, but in the north, the winds blow eastward. Because Cabot was sailing westward against the wind, his ship sailed slowly.

Several weeks later, a sailor saw a seagull. They sailed toward a pine-covered coastline. When Cabot reached the shore, he claimed the land for England. He named it New Found Land—or Newfoundland. Cabot thought he had landed in the northeast part of Asia.



Cabot and his crew continued sailing south down the coast. In the shallow waters, called shoals, the sailors found swarms of codfish. Cabot is believed to have sailed as far south as Boston, Massachusetts. He was sure that China and Japan were just to the south. Cabot sailed home for England to share the news of his discoveries.

The trip was quicker because the eastward-blowing winds pushed the *Matthew* along. He reached Bristol, England, on August 6, 1497.

In 1498 Cabot once again sailed five ships west toward what he still thought was the Indies. The voyage is an historical mystery. One ship, heavily damaged by storms, returned to England. What happened to Cabot and the other four ships is unknown.

Like Christopher Columbus, John Cabot never realized his mistake. Instead of reaching the Indies, the two European explorers had landed upon a new continent.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Meet John Cabot

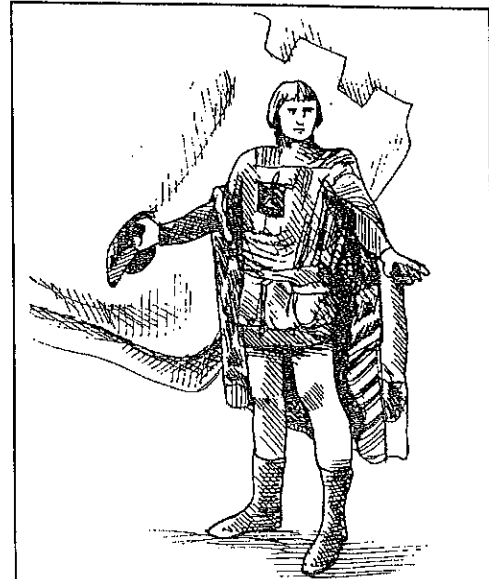
Born: about 1450 in Genoa, Italy

Died: 1499

John Cabot moved to England in 1484, seeking an opportunity to explore and obtain the fabulous riches of China. Like Columbus and others of his time, John Cabot thought there must be a sea route to the riches of Asia by sailing west instead of east.

After being turned down by merchants in Spain and Portugal, Cabot received a charter from Henry VII of England, giving him the right to discover new lands. The king provided only one small ship (less than 70 feet long) called the *Matthew* and a crew of 18. Cabot and his crew were forced to turn back during their first voyage in 1496 due to bad weather and lack of food.

Cabot sailed from England on a second voyage on May 2, 1497, taking a route much further to the north than Columbus had taken. On June 24, they sighted land somewhere in Newfoundland.



Although John Cabot sounds like an English name, he was actually Italian. He lived for a time in Venice and worked as a trader in what we now call the Middle East. In Italy, he was known as Giovanni Caboto.

1. Counting the day they left and the day they arrived, how many days did this voyage take?

Cabot, like Columbus, was convinced he had found an island off the coast of Asia and called it "new found land."

2. Do you think "Newfoundland" was a good name? Why or why not? _____

When he returned to England two months later, he didn't bring any riches, silk, or spices, but he had made a map of part of the North American coast. He also reported that one only had to lower a basket over the side of the boat, and it would be filled with fish. King Henry agreed to finance another voyage. Cabot's ship was joined by four other ships provided by merchants who hoped to cash in on what they thought was a new route to the Orient. They left in May, 1498. One of the merchant ships returned to England for repairs, but the other four, with John Cabot as captain, were never seen again.

Check It Out:

The Travels of John and Sebastian Cabot by Joanne Mattern
John Cabot and Son by David Goodnough

Name: _____ Date: _____



Part of the charter granted to John Cabot by Henry VII reads as follows:

“Be known that we have given ... to John Cabot, citizen of Venice, and to Lewis, Sebastian and Sancio, sons of the said John ... full and free authority... to sail to all parts, regions and coasts of the eastern, western and northern sea ... to find, discover and investigate whatsoever islands, countries, regions or provinces of heathens and infidels, in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians.”

1. Summarize what you think King Henry meant in the first part of this charter. Use a dictionary if any of the words are unclear.

“John and his sons ... may conquer, occupy and possess whatsoever such towns, castles, cities and islands by them thus discovered ... as our vassals and governors ... acquiring for us the dominion, title and jurisdiction of the same [places] ... so discovered ... [All] gains and revenues accruing from this voyage ... [they] shall be bound [upon arriving in] our port of Bristol ... to pay to us, either in goods or money, the fifth part of the whole capital gained ... that they may bring back with them from those places newly discovered.”

2. According to this section of the charter, what percentage of the amount earned would be due to the king?

“And further we have granted ... that all mainlands, islands, towns, cities, castles and other places whatsoever discovered by them, however numerous they may happen to be, may not be frequented or visited by any other subjects of ours ... without the license of ... John and his sons ... on pain of loss as well of the ships or vessels daring to sail to these places discovered ...”

3. What rights does this section of the charter give to John Cabot?

4. If you had been John Cabot, would you have wanted to accept this charter from the king? Why or why not?

Cabot Sails for England

The Spanish went to great lengths in their efforts to follow up Christopher Columbus's first and second voyages and establish permanent colonies throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean. However, the Spanish largely remained south of what is today the United States. It remained for other explorers sponsored by other countries to explore the area of the Eastern seaboard.

One such explorer landed in America within just a few years of Columbus. His name was John Cabot. Although there are some doubts, it seems that Cabot was another seagoing explorer from Genoa, just as Columbus was. Little is known about this celebrated navigator. No one knows exactly when he was born; even the year of his death is not clear. Even his birth name is not for certain. He may have been named Giovanni or Zuan Caboto. But his voyage to North America in the 1490s is well documented.

In 1461, he took up residence in the great trading city-state of Venice in northern Italy. There he became a merchant, making long-distance trips as far east as Arabia, where he heard stories about the spices that lay further east. By 1490, he moved to England with his three sons—Ludovico, Sancto, and Sebastiano—and made his reputation as a well-seasoned merchant and seaman.

Cabot began to formulate a theory similar to Columbus's of sailing west to reach the East. In fact, from the stories he had heard on his many travels to the Orient, he had become convinced that the "isle of Brazil," a place where spices could be found in abundance, lay to the west of England, further north than Columbus believed it to be located.

When, in 1492, Columbus made his first voyage in search of the Far Eastern spice islands, he reached the New World without realizing it. But his discovery further convinced Cabot that Columbus had sailed too far south. The Venetian merchant appealed to the king of England, Henry VII, for permission and support to make such an exploration. In the spring of 1496, Henry granted Cabot the

privilege to seek the islands. When he made the voyage, poor winds and a shortage of supplies caused him to return home. The next year, Cabot sailed to the west aboard a single ship, the *Matthew*, with 18 men, including his son, Sebastian.

After 50 days of sailing, Cabot reached North America on June 24, 1497. (Columbus was still busy exploring the Caribbean islands at that time, making Cabot the first European since the Norsemen 500 years earlier to reach the American mainland.) While it is not known exactly where Cabot and his crew landed, it was in the vicinity of Labrador and Newfoundland. Here he found the great fishing banks of northeastern Canada. By the end of July, Cabot returned to England, where he was warmly received by King Henry, who gave him permission to sail again the next year.

Cabot's second voyage a year later included five ships and 300 men. He planned to return to North America and search south of his previous voyage. On the way, storms struck, damaging one ship, forcing it to return to England. This would prove to be the only one of Cabot's five ships to return; the other four disappeared, and John Cabot was never heard from again. Yet England laid claim to the portion of North America that Cabot had discovered.

Years later, John Cabot's second son, Sebastian, commanded voyages to America on behalf of England (1508) and Spain (1526). He discovered Hudson Bay, giving England a claim to further territory in North America.

Review and Write

1. Why were the voyages of John and Sebastian Cabot important to England?
2. After the voyages of Columbus, where did the Spanish establish colonies?
3. After the voyages of Columbus, what parts of the New World remained open for colonization by other European nations?