



John Cabot



Early Life

John Cabot was most likely born in Italy, sometime around the year 1450. In Italy, he is referred to as Giovanni Caboto. Not much is known about his early life, except for the fact that he became a Venetian citizen (resident of Venice) in 1476. In the 1480's, he married a woman named Mattea and had three sons. In the 1490's, he apparently moved to Spain and then England, at least in part, to escape debt accrued in Italy.

Sailing West to Reach the Indies

After the Columbus discovery of the West Indies, Cabot began formulating a plan to reach “the Indies” by sailing west at a more northerly latitude, where the voyage from Europe would be shorter. Historians believe that Cabot found supporters in the English city of Bristol, which was the second largest sea port in England. In 1496, he made Bristol the headquarters for his seafaring operations and began to make preparations for a journey across the ocean.

Exploring Eastern Canada

Cabot probably first set sail in 1496, though this first voyage proved unsuccessful and Cabot turned back to England. In 1497, Cabot is thought to have set sail again with his son Sebastian and seventeen other crew members. This time, his voyage was successful. One of the boats under his command, the “Matthew,” sighted land and probably landed on Labrador, Newfoundland, or Cape Breton Island in modern-day eastern Canada on June 24, 1497, after 52 days at sea. Cabot claimed this land for England. Cabot continued to explore the maritime region of Canada and thought he found part of Asia, but never found the famed Northwest Passage.

Way Off-Course

Cabot and his crew quickly sailed back to England, where he was welcomed as a hero. Cabot promised Henry VII that the land he found was full silk and spices, and that the land he discovered was close to Japan. The king was easily convinced to finance Cabot's next journey, which set sail in 1498. This expedition was outfitted with two ships and 300 men. Sailing west from Bristol, the expedition pushed north along the coast of Greenland. The farther north they sailed along the coast, however, the colder it became and the larger the icebergs were. Cabot's crew mutinied and he was forced to navigate to the south, where no new discoveries were made. Cabot and his crew returned in England in the fall of 1498 and he died shortly thereafter.