Partici-Paper

Inverness County, Cape Breton

July/ August 1997
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From the *DIRECTOR'S DESK*

Senior Games: The Recreation/ Tourism Department has received a lot of positive feedback with regard to the first Inverness County Games held recently at the Inverness Jr/Sr High in Inverness. An evaluation of the games is underway. It is hoped the Senior Games will become an annual event with input from Seniors' clubs from across the County. For more information on this year's Senior Games, see page 15.

THANK YOU! **We wish to sincerely thank the participants, spectators, volunteers, and anyone who assisted in any way to the Senior Games. Your generous support made it all possible.**

The manner in which this event was held is a great credit to each and everyone who took part. This celebration of active living among our senior populations will become, we hope, an annual event and one in which we can look forward to with great anticipation.

-from the Staff of Recreation/Tourism

Summer Events Brochure: Summer events brochures have been distributed to businesses and residents of Inverness County. This year's brochure is full to the brim with many events and activities inviting everyone to celebrate the music and amenities of Inverness County. This is definitely a summer to celebrate our music!

PUBLICITY: Any organizations planning events open to the public are encouraged to keep the Inverness County Recreation/Tourism Department up-to-date on your activities so we may help you promote them throughout the summer. Telephone (902) 787-2274, or (902) 787-3384.

Museums: Did you know that Inverness County has as many as twelve museums? This summer we encourage Inverness County residents as well a visitors to the area to drop in to the various museums and explore your family history, watch a demonstration of rug hooking, spinning or weaving, learn about the salmon who swim the famous Margaree river or maybe join in an old fashioned milling frolic. For a complete listing of our museums, contact our office.

The Inverness/ Victoria Counties Running Circuit: For information on the 1997 running circuit, check page 31 of this issue.

Have a great tall ships summer!

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Next *Partici-Paper* deadline: August 8

Partici-Paper

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Contributions of information, articles, photos, art work are welcome. We also welcome your letters and comments.

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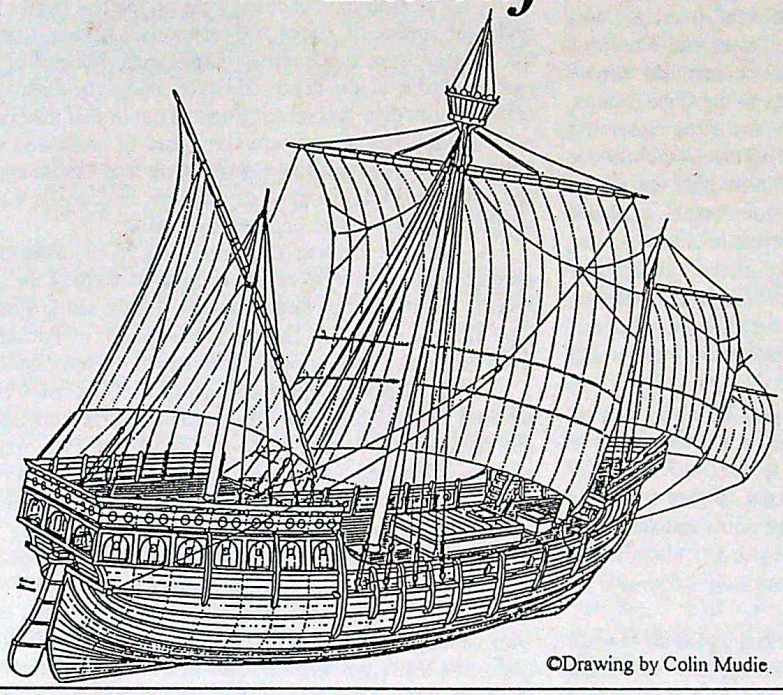
Landfalls and politics



©Drawing by Colin Mudie.

Where Cabot landed in 1497 will likely never be known. What is as certain as death and taxes is that the "discovery" of North America began as politics, and the politics of fish, racial relations, and government funding are very much a part of the landing story in 1997.

by Mary Anne Ducharme

In a fair wind John Cabot set out from Bristol in his 23-metre caravel called the *Matthew*. May 2, 1497 was a day of personal triumph. Just a few years earlier Columbus had returned from his own voyage totally convinced he had reached Asia by sailing west. Columbus had spiced the accounts of his adventures with bragging and exaggeration and he credited himself with having special favour with God, and having brought glory and riches to Spain. Cabot scoffed at his rival, choosing not to be convinced that he had reached the Orient. Instead, he conceived a plan to sail on a far more northern (and shorter) latitude than Columbus and claim the glory of true discovery for himself. The political rivalry between England and Spain was intense, spies were carrying tales back and forth, but Cabot was not motivated by any patriotic allegiance. Like most adventurers and navigators of limited financial means, his motivation was the need for funding.

Nor could he claim lands as a mere independent, and John Cabot had a healthy regard for future fame and fortune. Seeking a coveted Royal Charter, he went to Spain but found Ferdinand and Isabella not in the least interested in financing his pipe dream. Their energies and interests were to the south,

continued next page

Our cover:

We are proud to feature a montage of Cabot's Voyage by Lewis Parker.

The painting, shown in segment, is one of a series of twelve 5' x 7' historical illustrations which were commissioned in the mid-1980's by The University College of Cape Breton.

Many thanks to Lew Parker and to the Beaton Institute at UCCB for permission to use the painting for our July/ August cover.

Toronto-born Lewis Parker is the most prominent of historical illustrators in Canada. His father was born in Dartmouth, his paternal grandmother was a Mi'kmaq from Nova Scotia and he continues to have family ties and affinity to this province.

He became a political cartoonist and illustrator for several prominent magazines and newspapers including *The Toronto Star* and *MacLean's Magazine*, and began serious historical paintings in 1968 when the Huronia Council in Ontario commissioned several paintings from him. This was followed by many other commissions including Parks Canada for whom he completed painting of Fort Beausejour, Grand Pre, and Louisbourg. The National Museum of Man in Ottawa commissioned three enormous paintings, 16' x 75' depicting the *History of Mankind*. His work appears on Canadian postage stanps, is in high demand for illustrating history books, and millions of Lew Parker prints have circulated through Unicef.

Examples of his original work can be seen at Fortress Louisbourg and at the Beaton Institute at the University College of Cape Breton in Sydney.

Landfalls and politics, *continued*

and they had only slightly pierced North America. His obsessive plan suffered another blow when the King of Portugal gave him nothing because that country had thrown resources into finding an eastern sea route to the spice islands.

He sensed accurately, however, that King Henry VII of England surely would not want to be left out of the race for quick wealth. Since the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, Spain and Portugal were busy carving up the globe for themselves, and it certainly was not good politics to allow this to continue.

John Cabot moved to London to curry favour and patronage among wealthy London and Bristol merchants to help him get a Royal Charter. He was helped by the fact that he arrived with a reputation as an excellent mariner with a solid knowledge of navigation.

Soon after the charter was granted, there was an attempt at a voyage, but it was aborted because of poor planning. On May 2 of the following spring, with a crew of eighteen men including his son Sabastian, Cabot sailed his charted course around Ireland and then north and west in a good wind on a latitude between 50°N and 52° N until June 21 or 22-- which would have brought the ship in the area of Cape Baud and the Strait of Belle Isle.

Some historians claim that Cabot sailed on May 22 with a heading for Dursey Head in Ireland (51° 33') from where the *Matthew* turned west. At that latitude, he would arrive approximately at Cape Degrat (51° 37'), less than five miles from the former Norse settlement of L'Anse aux Meadows on the Great Northern Peninsula. With a latitude error of two degrees, the landfall could actually have been Cape Bonavista.

Fifteenth century records relate that the *Matthew* ran into a storm that along with the Labrador Current may have pushed him well south of Newfoundland to somewhere on the Grand Banks. The landfall of Cape North (45° 57') is certainly not far-fetched because Sugar Loaf Mountain can be spotted far out to sea. In a 1544 map at the National Library of Paris, next to Cape Breton are written the words "this land was discovered by John Cabot, the Venetian, and Sebastian Cabot, his son." The map is attributed to Sebastian Cabot.

Cabot and his men saw no natives of that place, but he did not dare advance inland beyond the shooting distance of a crossbow. He and his men found where a camp fire had been made, there were snares set for game, and notches in trees. He picked up a needle for making nets. He noted tall trees which were suitable for making masts. This detail has been seized upon by Cape Breton landfall advocates because such trees would be far more typical of Nova Scotia than Labrador or Newfoundland. After taking in fresh water for the ship, he planted a large cross with a banner of England, one for Pope Alexander VI, and one for St. Mark, the patron saint of Venice.

Codfish Politics

The politics of codfish is one of the real stories just under the surface of Cabot 500 celebrations. Cabot received his charter from the English King partly because of the monopolized Icelandic dried cod fishery under the sovereignty of the Danish: they had forced England out of that fishery. As well, several merchants were convinced of profit and were willing to take the risk that Cabot might find new sources of cod. Meatless Fridays and 40 days of Lent in Catholic Europe meant that there was an enormous potential.

After the landing, Cabot sailed for 960 nautical miles, exactly where is a mystery, discovering on the way the great fishing wealth of the North Atlantic. He named features of land that he observed. There was Baccalaos, a Portuguese word meaning " land of cod." We know it as Newfoundland.

The explorer reported to Henry VII that fish were so plentiful that not only could they be caught in nets, but also by merely lowering weighted baskets into the sea. Fish were so numerous that "they sumtymes stayed his shippes," according to one report. The King was assured that he would no longer have to depend on Iceland for fish.

He explored the codfish areas off Newfoundland and what he found drew English, Portuguese, Basque, and French fishermen who came summer after summer beginning in the 16th century to fish coastal waters. This was the Promised Land, the heaven of all fisheries, and every baited hook and handline that went in the water came out with big, beautiful fish. The quintal, or hundredweight, of cod became Canada's first currency, and toasts were drunk to "the Pope and ten dollars"-- the price of the catch per quintal. The fishing trade led to later development of dry fisheries and to rivalries for the North American mainland.

Farley Mowat recounts what happened to the wonderful fishery of the North Atlantic in his book *Sea of Slaughter*. A hundred years after Cabot, as many as 650 vessels were catching thousands of tons of cod and the supply seemed inexhaustible. By 1620, the cod fleet in the region was 1,000 vessels making two voyages annually. In 1783, at least 1,500 ships of all nations were working the "cod mines " for all they were worth. At the turn of our own century, the annual catch of cod was near a million tons, and 1,600 vessels were fishing on the Grand Banks.

The inevitable result was obvious by the 1950's when cod landings for the Grand Banks and Newfoundland went down to a fifth of what they had been a half century earlier. Instead of conserving, bigger and more numerous trawlers and draggers and factory ships vacuumed the ocean and catches became bigger, increasing until the 1968 catch was two million tons. Powerful cartels and national governments competed furiously with each other for the diminishing cod that was left, leaving small independent fishermen out in the cold. Soon

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