

The commander, John Cabot, with his family, had established himself in England. On the petition of this John Cabot and his three sons—Louis, Sebastian, and Sancia—a patent was granted by Henry VII., dated March 5, 1496, empowering them and those associated with them, at their own expense, to discover any new lands not hitherto claimed by any Christian monarch, and to take them in possession for England. Cabot sailed from Bristol the following spring. On his voyage he discovered the American Continent, and in three months he returned with a report of his discovery. As an outcome of this voyage a flotilla of four ships with 300 men was fitted out the following year. The second patent was granted in favour of John Cabot alone. There is nothing to guide us as to the position he assumed on this voyage. The credit of the voyage was afterwards claimed by his son Sebastian, who returned in command. It has been supposed that John Cabot may have died at sea, as nothing is known of his services on this second voyage. What is of importance in the annals of Canada is the first voyage of John Cabot in 1497. Some writers on this subject have attributed to him the discovery of Newfoundland on his first voyage; modern inquiry rejects this view, and there is a consensus of all who have diligently examined this subject that the landfall of John Cabot of June 24, 1497, was on the most eastern point of Cape Breton, now part of the province of Nova Scotia, in the Dominion of Canada. Of the second voyage of the Cabots, in 1498, with which the name of Sebastian, the captain, is generally identified, the accepted opinion is that he struck land at Labrador, and descended the coast southerly as far as Cape Hatteras.

I must ask to be permitted to refer briefly to the historical records, known, doubtless, to many who hear me. In placing John Cabot first as the discoverer of the mainland of America, I have not forgotten the claim advanced in favour of Columbus. Columbus left Spain in 1492 to reach the island of San Salvador, and it was not until his third voyage, in August 1498, that he sighted that part of South America not far removed from the territory now in dispute with Venezuela. Thus Columbus saw for the first time the continent of South America more than a year after Cabot made his memorable discovery, and it does not appear that he (Columbus) sighted North America proper on any one of his voyages. The same may be said of Amerigo Vesputius, after whom the Western Continent has been named. If his own account is trustworthy, Vesputius reached America eighteen days before Columbus. According to Humboldt and others, the opinion is that