

Cabot reported that the waters around Newfoundland were teeming with fish. By the mid-1500s large fleets of English, French, Portuguese and Spanish ships were fishing in Newfoundland waters.

Although the fishing ships of various nations probably maintained shore facilities and left overwintering crews in Newfoundland from the early 1500s onward, the land was regarded largely as a convenience for the migratory fishery and was not officially claimed until 1583, when Sir Humphrey Gilbert visited St. John's and took possession of Newfoundland for Queen Elizabeth I of England. While unofficial settlement was well established by the mid-sixteenth century, official attempts at colonization, largely unsuccessful, did not begin until 1610. Official colonization by the French did not occur until 1662, with the establishment of a settlement at Placentia.

Hostilities between France and England spread to the New World in 1692 and St. John's, the main English settlement in Newfoundland, was captured by the French in 1696 and again in 1708. By the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 France relinquished to England all her rights in Newfoundland, except to St. Pierre. Nevertheless, Newfoundland continued to be a centre of conflict in the more or less continuous English-French and English-American Wars until the early part of the nineteenth century.

During the seventeenth century, powerful fishing interests from England's "West Country" succeeded in convincing the British Crown to enact harsh laws aimed at discouraging the settlement of Newfoundland. These West Country merchants feared that a resident population of independent Newfoundland fishermen would seriously weaken their monopoly. The wars of the seventeenth century disrupted the English fishery in Newfoundland and in the latter part of the century, a rapid increase occurred in the resident population. By the time the anti-settlement laws were finally repealed in 1824, Newfoundland's population was well in excess of 50,000.

Throughout most of the nineteenth century the Newfoundland economy thrived on the twin resources of the cod fishery and the annual seal hunt. Representative government was granted in 1832 and responsible government was extended in 1855. Many of the most impressive buildings of present-day Newfoundland were constructed during the prosperous years of the early and middle 1800s.

During the late 1800s, however, the economy began to diversify. The cross-island railroad, begun in 1881, was completed in 1898; saw-milling became an important industry in central Newfoundland; large-scale mining developments began at Bell Island and in the Notre Dame Bay area, and indigenous manufacturing flourished on