

STATEMENT MADE BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR  
FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, THE HONOURABLE ALLAN J.  
MACEachEN AT THE OPENING OF A CANADIAN  
EXHIBITION ON THE LAW OF THE SEA IN THE  
CHAPLAINCY CENTRE OF EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY  
OCTOBER 22, 1975

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It was on the north coast of Cape Breton Island that Sebastiano Caboto first landed, in 1497; and my constituents would never forgive me for failing to mention this historical fact, the accuracy of which is attested by the Cape Breton Historical Society, as I open in Edinburgh this Canadian Exhibition on the Law of the Sea.

Caboto - or Cabot, as the British called him, - is credited of course with the first historically-recorded landing in Canada; but in the late 15th and early 16th centuries the waters off our coasts were literally swarming with foreign navigators - almost as much as they are today with foreign fishing fleets, at the expense of Canadian fishermen!

Archeologists, of course, have found evidence of Viking and Armorican landings on the eastern coast of North America; and no one will ever convince me that fearless Scots from Lewis or Skye or Mull did not also make the perilous transatlantic voyage - and regularly! Nevertheless, Chroniclers list, after the Italian's first crossing, those of the Portuguese Cortereal in 1500, of the English Warde in 1502, of the Scot Elliott in 1503 - a distant ancestor, perhaps of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau - and of the French Denys in 1506.

These navigators were drawn to the fog-bound uncharted and icy stretches of the North-West Atlantic by the riches of the New World; and of those riches, only one had then been proven: the fisheries. After all, it was Cabot's father, Giovanni, who gave Newfoundland her first name; and it was not "Terra Nova" but "Terra de Bacalão" - the Land of the Cod!

In retrospect, this great international adventure seems like an anticipation of contemporary Canada, of what we call the Canadian Mosaic, of a people from many lands, brought together within a common political framework by the challenge of building a new society, but intent upon preserving their many cultural and ethnic filiations. Look at Cabot: an Italian, hired by an English king, setting foot on an island first settled by the French and peopled later by Scots. The same nations - and many others - who sired the great navigators were later to provide Canada with what remains today her scarcest resource: people.