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John Cabot's Landfall, 1497 • "It WAS Cape Breton!" INTRODUCTION: The time has come to throw down the gauntlet and get the battle raging over where John Cabot's "first land seen" in 1497 really was. Let this article be an early and provocative jab. Dr. Bruce Fergusson proclaims Cape Breton Island as that place John Cabot first saw • the "New Founde Land" discovered on reaching this side of the North Atlantic • and most likely the cape near Gab- arus. There will be those in Cape Breton and New? foundland who disagree. And at Cape Breton's Magazine we enjoy what WAS thought as much • often more • than what is currently thought. What's best is that something is thought, and that can't come without provocation'and thus this "article as gauntlet" is hereby thrown down. We hope that you enjoy this edited version of Dr. C. Bruce Fer- gusson's 1953 article, "Cabot's Landfall." And we hope you will want to respond. from Cabot's Landfall by O. B. Fergusson While the profound importance and the far-reaching conse? quences of the discovery of North America by John Cabot in 1497 have long been realized, and in some measure recognized, his landfall in the New World still remains unmarked. [Note: When this was written, the plaques and bust of John Cabot had not yet been placed at the provincial park on Aspy Bay beach in northern Cape Breton.] But it indicates neither a lack of in? terest in doing honour to a distinguished navigator for his out? standing services, nor a paucity of those who have urged the marking of his landfall or advanced claims with respect to its site. His name and his fame are perpetuated by Cabot Strait, which separates Cape Breton Island from Newfoundland, by the Cabot Trail, witfi its unsurpassed scenic splendour, in Cape Breton Island, and by Cabot Tower on Signal Hill, at St. John's in Newfoundland. It is very fitting that Cabot's activities should be so commemo? rated in both Cape Breton Island and Newfoundland, for his John Cabot sighting North America, 1497, drawn by C.W. Jeffreys voyages had great significance for each. Yet these memorials, through their different locations, may also indicate the crux of the Cabotian controversy: there is still a lack of unanimity with respect to the site of Cabot's landfall in 1497. There are some who would claim it for Cape Breton Island, as well as others who would attribute it to Newfoundland or Labrador. And now that Newfoundland is a part of the Canadian nation, these rival claims have been revived, the evidence has been re-considered and re-sifted, and, if it is now possible, a decision should be reached on this matter. This is, of course, not the fu- st investigation of this problem. Near the end of the nineteenth century, a committee of the Royal Soci? ety of Canada, which had been appointed by that society to make preparations for the Cabot Celebration which was to be held in 1897, declared that they were of opinion that the greatly prepon? derating weight of evidence pointed to the easternmost cape of Cape Breton as the landfall of John Cabot in 1497. But, at the same time, they observed that the commemoration then pro? posed, which wUl be described more fully below, would not commit the Royal Society of Canada, as a whole, to the definite EXPLORE OUR PAST.. CAPE BRETON CENTRE FOR HERITAGE & SCIENCE • 225 GEORGE STREET* (OPEN YEAR ROUND) Summer: Mid-June to Labour Day 10-4Mon-Sat (902)



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