

JACQUES CARTIER



Jacques Cartier was born in France in 1491. He was the first European to map, travel, and attempt to establish a settlement in the St. Lawrence region of Canada. Not much is known about his early life. He became a sea captain and was encouraged to explore by the voyage of Giovanni Verrazano.

The King of France ordered Cartier to find gold, other riches, and more importantly, a northwest passageway to China. Between 1534 and 1541, Cartier made three voyages to the St. Lawrence region. His detailed records are among the first documents of European exploration in North America. They were very important to future mapping of the New World.

Cartier's first voyage followed the route of John Cabot to Newfoundland. He then traveled through Labrador to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and several islands and bays. Near the Gaspée peninsula Cartier met the Micmac tribe and traded with them. He also met a group of Iroquois called the Hurons who helped guide him through the area. With their help he reached the sites of today's Quebec and Montreal. The Huron chief, Donnacona and other natives told Cartier of gold and other treasure to the north. Cartier kidnapped Donnacona and his sons and took them back to France as interpreters. He wanted the French King to hear their stories.

His second voyage in 1535 focused in what is now Quebec. Cartier explored the Saguenay River. He discovered many river rapids. This second voyage was very important because Cartier proved that Newfoundland was an island. Cartier mistakenly thought that the St. Lawrence waterway was a passageway to China.

His third voyage was in 1541. Cartier wanted to establish a permanent colony and spread the Christian religion. Some Hurons (who realized the French had come to stay) killed some of his men. Cartier's plan to settle was unsuccessful so he returned to France. He never returned to North America.

Although the French failed to settle North America at this time, Cartier's explorations gave detailed information about the St. Lawrence Gulf and River. The only treasures Cartier found were pyrite and quartz. He brought them back to France thinking they were gold and diamonds. Cartier died in September 1557 at age 66. He still believed the St. Lawrence led to China.