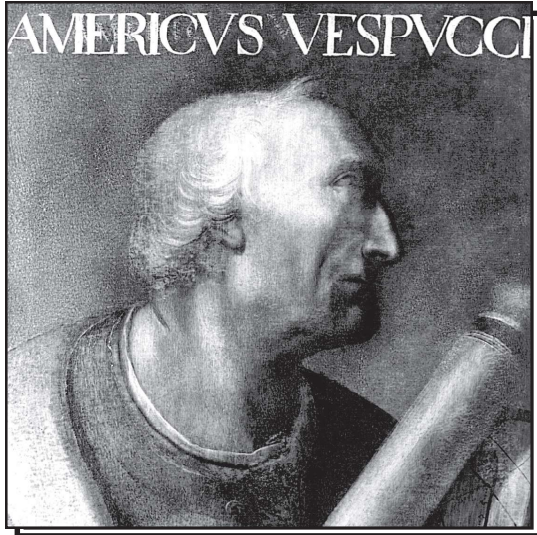


# AMERIGO VESPUCCI



**A**merigo Vespucci was born in Italy, March 1451. He and his four brothers lived in a large home with their parents. As a young boy, Vespucci loved to study the stars. One of his hobbies was copying maps. He dreamed one day of traveling to find out what the Earth looked like. He became a businessman to earn enough money to explore. But he still needed a country to sponsor him.

Italy already had a large trade with the Asian merchants and wasn't interested in exploration.

In 1492, Vespucci went to Spain. He knew that Spain was sponsoring exploration. Spain eventually agreed to sponsor him. In 1499, he sailed westward from Spain with four ships. About a month later, they reached the northern coast of South America. Vespucci headed south and was the first European to see Brazil. He explored the mouth of the Amazon River. Before he returned to Spain, he stopped in the Bahamas, capturing 200 natives to take back as slaves. At times, Vespucci bought Native American slaves and sold them at other ports to gain money for his ships' provisions.

Vespucci was still sure there was a passage through these new lands to Asia. He sailed west again in May 1501, this time sponsored by the King of Portugal. He reached the eastern tip of Brazil and went as far south as Argentina. Vespucci used his interest in geography, what he knew about the size of the known world, and this new discovery to estimate the earth's size. His estimate was within 50 miles of its actual size! However, he still believed that he was near the Indian Ocean and Asia. He returned to Portugal in June 1502.

Sailing once more for Spain in 1503, Vespucci sailed along the southeastern side of South America and even spotted the Falkland Islands. When they returned to Europe, Vespucci's crew told their story of the new lands to mapmakers. A German mapmaker named Martin Waldseemuller drew a new world map in 1507. He labeled the southern land that Vespucci explored "America."

Amerigo Vespucci's greatest contribution was that his voyages made it clear that there was a continent that lay between Europe and Asia. Later voyages by other explorers proved that there were not just one but two large continents. Both were named after Amerigo Vespucci.

In 1508 Vespucci died of malaria contracted on his voyages.