

JOHN CABOT (1425 – c.1500)

Originally from Italy, John Cabot went to England to get backing from King Henry VII and the merchants of Bristol to search for a sea route to Asia. He was the first of the explorers of that period to land on the North American continent.

For navigators, like John Cabot,
Ocean trips became a habit.
From youth, he heard the waters call —
He was Venetian, after all.

But Bristol merchants, and the King,
Financed John Cabot's journeying.
In 1497, he
Aboard the *Matthew* went to sea.
He reached the coast, we understand,
Most probably in Newfoundland.
In fact, the date he landed on
Was at the feast day of St John.

He raised a flag, in England's name,
Set several snares to capture game,
And said: "Lest anyone forgets,
I'll leave this needle too, for nets —
Then passers-by will be advised
This place is truly colonised."

No doubt the people living there
Were not aware, or didn't care

That he had come to their locality
And claimed to change their nationality!

More vital was the news he bore
Of oceans full of fish galore:
For Cabot on the way had found
The future Grand Banks fishing ground.

Though people praise Columbus more
For *his* trip, just five years before,
That sailor, after many dramas,
Had only got to the Bahamas;
While Cabot, with the same intent,
At least had reached the Continent.

Yet both explorers never ceased
To think that they had reached the East.
They didn't know, like us today,
America was in the way!



JACQUES CARTIER

JACQUES CARTIER (1491 – 1557)

Jacques Cartier was the first European to explore the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence River. His encounters with the Iroquois ranged from friendship to hostility, and the treasure he finally brought home was not what he expected.

“Sail west!” Jacques Cartier was told,
“And find me countries rich in gold.”
The King of France had spoken, so
Jacques thought he’d really better go.
Besides, it was a mission which
With any luck, would make him rich.

He crossed the ocean, but he found
That Labrador was barren ground.
He treated it with some abhorrence —
But then he came to the St. Lawrence.
He crossed the Gulf, and made his way
Along the coast to Gaspé Bay.

And there he managed to annoy
The friendly local Iroquois
By putting up a giant cross
To show them all just who was Boss.

Chief Donnacona wasn’t pleased —
But strained relations soon were eased.
It was Jacques’ Gallic charm, we think —
Or was there something in the drink?

At any rate, Jacques took the chance
To ask the Chief's two sons to France.

The next year, when he brought them back,
They helped to put him on the track:
They showed him the St. Lawrence River.
"What riches I can now deliver!"
Exclaimed Jacques Cartier, as they told
Of distant kingdoms, full of gold.

He also thought the river went
Right through into the Orient.
And so, continuing his saga,
He sailed right on, to Hochelaga.

There, he was joyfully received.
He'd cure the sick, they all believed.
He read the Gospel of St John,
And though their pains and aches weren't gone,
They kindly didn't swear and curse:
At least, he hadn't made them worse.

A nearby mountain he did name,
And *Mont-Royal* it then became —
Now Montreal, the very same.
Then winter came, and scurvy too.
No Gospel cured that, Cartier knew.

The Iroquois' white-cedar brew
Was what saved most of Cartier's crew.

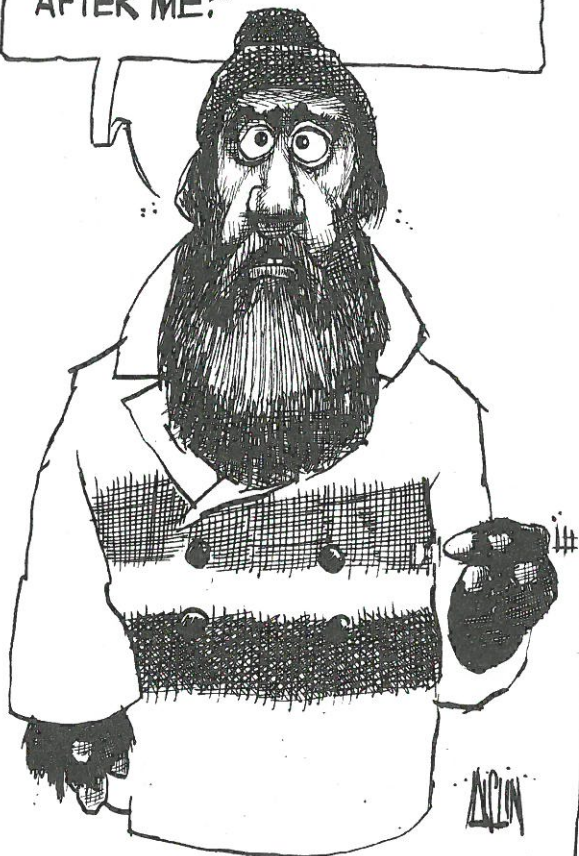
No thanks they got, but only grief:
In spring Jacques came and seized their Chief.
He took ten other prisoners too.
"I'll bring them back as good as new!"
That's what he promised, but we know
His vows all melted, with the snow.

To Canada the navigator
Did not return till six years later.
This time, he built a settlement:
To colonize was his intent.
But he was even more delighted
When gold and diamonds were sighted.

He thought that they'd be valued highly
And he would live the life of Riley.
But back in France, he found the ore
Was iron pyrites, nothing more,
And learned from valuers' reports
His diamonds were only quartz.

At least, the jewellers today
Have saved the name of CARTIER!

RIVERS, TOWNS, BAYS AND
DEPARTMENT STORES—SURE!
BUT, WHAT KIND OF SICKO
WOULD NAME A WARM COAT
AFTER ME?



HENRY HUDSON

HENRY HUDSON (died 1611)

Henry Hudson, who gave his name to so many places, made four voyages searching for a northern route to the Pacific and China, and was finally cast adrift in an open boat by his rebellious crew.

Henry Hudson several times
Tried to sail to Eastern climes
Searching for the Isles of Spice,
But was always foiled by ice.

People thought the route northeast
Would lead to China at the least,
But up among the Arctic seas
Hudson found not one Chinese.

On the third trip, Hudson's men,
Ice-bound, grumbled: "Not again!"
A mutiny was in the air,
But Hudson fixed them with a glare:
"Well, if you feel like that," he said,
"We'll turn and sail northwest, instead!"
It made the sailors much less frantic,
Sailing over the Atlantic.

Up the Hudson River then
To Albany he took his men,
Thus showing that this waterway
Could be a trading route one day.

"Whatever this new land has got,"
Said Hudson, "China it is not!"

And so next year, in 1610,
Henry Hudson sailed again.
The spicy Orient was beckoning —
From the west, by Hudson's reckoning.

He believed that Davis Strait
Would be the Northwest Passage gate,
And lead him to an Arctic Sea
Which from drifting ice was free.
But the tide, so fierce and great,
Swept him to another Strait:
The one named Hudson, after him —
Though then, his fate was looking grim.

The crew began to rage and curse,
But turning round would just be worse.
Through icy seas they made their way
Four hundred miles, at ten per day,
Emerging into Hudson Bay.
Henry Hudson felt terrific:
He thought he'd entered the Pacific!

So south they sailed, and found James Bay,
Thinking that China lay that way.
Hudson searched for many days

But found the coast was like a maze.
And then there came the winter snows,
And all the land and waters froze.

Although they built a house on shore,
The winter chilled them to the core.
Now and then they caught some game,
But the dreaded scurvy came
And Henry Hudson got the blame.

When the ice broke up, they sailed:
Though the China trip had failed,
Hudson at the least could say
He'd discovered Hudson Bay.

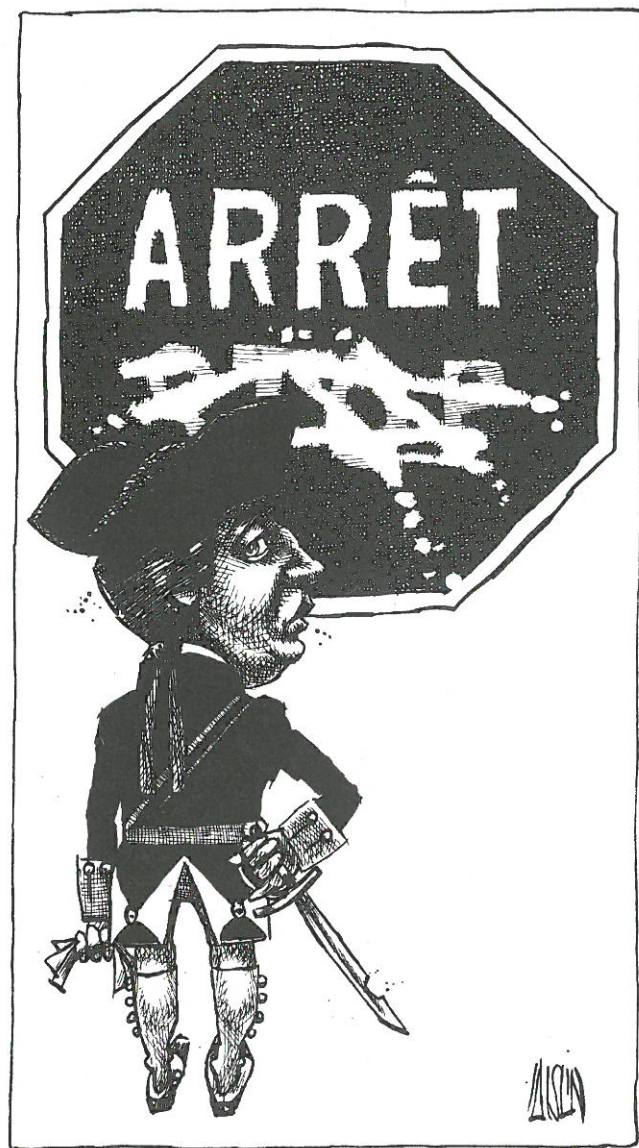
But he never got the chance —
The others looked at him askance,
And what really roused their passions
Was finding Hudson's hidden rations.

After that, he got short shrift:
Rebels cast a boat adrift
With Hudson and eight men on board.
The rest cried: "That is your reward!"

A mystery surrounds the ends
Of Henry Hudson and his friends,
Left in the icy seas to float

In a leaky open boat.
Bligh kept such a group together,
But *he* had rather warmer weather!

Hudson, though, could not survive —
And yet his name remains alive:
The Bay, the Company, the Strait,
And towns and rivers, make him great.
But dying of cold and of starvation,
Great fame is not much consolation.



JAMES WOLFE



SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE

SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE (1764 – 1820)

Alexander Mackenzie was ten when his family emigrated first to New York and then to Canada. He became a fur trader and made two epic journeys west, trekking by canoe and on foot in search of a route to the Pacific.

The search for furs; this was the quest
Which led Mackenzie to the west.
For there, the wilderness was rife
With every kind of furry life:
Beavers and otters, foxes, minks,
The wolf, the marten and the lynx.

They all made fashionable furs
And classy headgear, His and Hers.
For then the fur trade went unchecked,
Though not politically correct.
Creatures were killed without apology,
And no one cared about ecology.

The Athabasca River ran
Beside the new Fort Chipewyan,
And here Mackenzie's trek began.
With just twelve men in three canoes,
Slave River was the route he'd choose.
Off to the west they paddled forth,
Then found the river heading north.

Mackenzie wouldn't be downcast:
They paddled on, and paddled fast.
One hundred miles a day they went,
To reach the ocean their intent.
When finally they saw the sea,
All frozen it appeared to be.

Mackenzie grumbled: "What a shame!
This river here by which we came,
Let Disappointment be its name."
But others thought that name too grim,
And later named it after *him*.

His colleagues in the trade, however,
Were not impressed by his endeavour.
They said: "A sea of ice won't suit
As any kind of trading route."
Mackenzie though was resolute,
And four years later, with nine men
And one dog, he set out again.

Peace River was the way to go,
But did they find it peaceful? No!
Mackenzie and his nine companions
Faced rapids and cascades and canyons,
Hauled the canoe and all their goods
Up rocky paths through gloomy woods;
Midst snowy mountains, never warm,
They camped, and sheltered from a storm.

Mackenzie took the chance to write
Of all they'd done until that night,
Then in an empty rum keg placed
His diary of the route they'd traced
And all the dangers they had faced.

He cast the keg into the river
And hoped his note it would deliver.
The postal service now is better —
Then, it was chancier... and wetter!

For weeks Mackenzie and his team
Went bravely struggling upstream,
And wondered, was it all a dream?
Perhaps, although they'd done their best,
There *was* no river to the West.

But then they met a local guide
Who led them to the Great Divide.
And west from here, they had a notion,
Lay the great Pacific Ocean.
But soon, by icy waters battered,
Their lone canoe was nearly shattered:
Instead of paddling, as they planned,
They had to journey overland.

They found a river, guides who knew
This land where giant cedars grew,

And villages where they would dine
On salmon, deer, and porcupine.

But further on, the records tell us,
They met the warlike Bella Bellas
And found them much less friendly fellas.

An angry warrior climbed aboard
And grabbed Mackenzie's gun and sword,
And said white men, a few weeks back,
Had used such weapons to attack.
(The story that he told was true:
It was Vancouver and his crew.)

Back in his own canoe once more,
"Follow!" they heard the warrior roar.
Instead, they raced towards the shore;
They climbed a rock, and on the top
There for the night they had to stop.

Next day, as soon as it was light,
Two war canoes came into sight:
The outlook wasn't very bright.
And yet Mackenzie showed no fear —
He said: "Before we disappear,
The world must know that I was here!"

He wrote a record of his visit —
Like Kilroy, only more explicit:

Upon the rock, in letters great,
He scrawled his own name, and the date.
He wrote too, so they'd understand,
He'd come from Canada, by land.

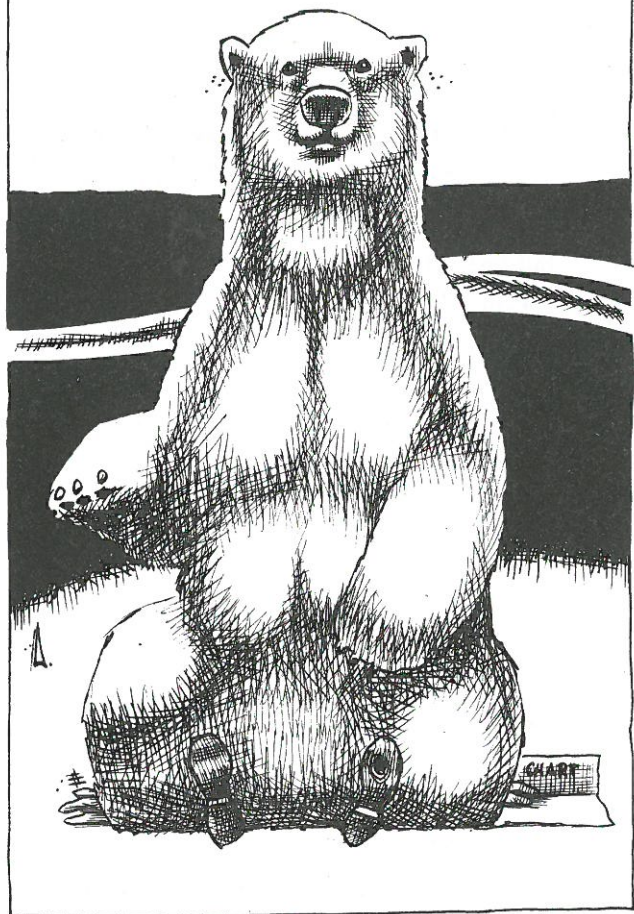
The others neither groused nor brooded
To see *their* names were not included,
For they were more concerned that day
With how to make their getaway.

The warriors' canoes gave chase
But finally they lost the race;
Yet still Mackenzie had to face
The cruel journey back to base.
Somehow, the party made their way
At nearly forty miles a day,
And Alexander gained much glory
By later publishing his story.

Among the readers, for a start,
There was Napoleon Bonaparte:
He planned to beat the British back
With a Canadian attack.

Back home, the King did not demur,
But promptly dubbed Mackenzie "Sir".
Which shows what marvels can occur
From starting out to search for fur!

The mysterious disappearance
of Sir John Franklin finally
explained...



SIR JOHN FRANKLIN

SIR JOHN FRANKLIN (1786 – 1847)

John Franklin was a naval officer who charted thousands of miles of Canada's Arctic coast in the quest for the Northwest Passage. He made four expeditions and met his death during the last one.

King William Island's frozen ground
Was where John Franklin's corpse was found,
His bones the only indication
Of that brave life of exploration.

From age fourteen, his naval life
Was filled with roving and with strife.
Then, Franklin saw his true vocation
In Canadian exploration.

The powers-that-be were all obsessed
With finding routes from east to west.
They sought the Northwest Passage which
Would help make everybody rich.

Franklin's first journey had no luck:
In polar ice they nearly stuck.
The second time from Hudson Bay
To Yellowknife he made his way,
Then down the river Coppermine —
The prospect, though, was far from fine.

Sometimes a frozen lake they crossed,
Their faces bitten by the frost.
Canoes on pairs of sleds were put:
Dogs dragged them, while men walked on foot.
The ice was honeycombed by rain,
And jagged edges caused great pain.
The men's and dogs' feet, when they bled,
Left on the ice a trail of red.

The journey seemed to take them ages,
And Franklin fumed with frequent rages.
No wonder that the Inuit feared
This sullen group, and disappeared.
And so, without the Inuits' aid,
The two canoes their journey made,
And for a month the coast surveyed.

Then food got short, and tempers too,
And murmurs of rebellion grew.
It wasn't long before John Franklin
Sensed grudges and resentments ranklin'.
He said: "We must return, it's plain:
I'll name this Point here Turnagain."
The men said: "Call it what you like —
But turn around, or we shall strike!"

They had no food, and their canoes
Were damaged far too much to use.

So overland the route they tried.
Frozen and starving, nine men died.
The rest, in order to survive,
Ate lichen just to keep alive.
A local tribe who knew the place
Found them, and brought them back to base.

Now, Franklin was a famous name;
And though a hero he became,
He found that life at home was boring,
And yearned again to go exploring.
Better equipped, he mapped once more
Hundreds of miles of Arctic shore.

Then late in life he got the chance
To make the final great advance.

Three hundred miles remained uncharted:
So for the Arctic coast he started —
But not before he watched them stowing
Three years' supplies to keep them going.
Steam boilers drove propellers, too,
And heated pipes to warm the crew.
A library of books was there,
And wine, cut-glass, and silverware.

In 1845, in May,
The ships sailed out to Baffin Bay.

But no one knew what happened then
To Franklin and his ships and men.
In that white world, so wild and weird,
They had completely disappeared.

The years passed — forty expeditions
Went sailing out on searching missions.
And Franklin's widow did her best
To press for yet another quest.
When she had waited fourteen years,
A gruesome find confirmed her fears.

King William Island was the site
Where Franklin's body came to light:
Two skeletons, one his, they guessed
From silver spoons that bore his crest.

The Northwest Passage now was mapped,
And in its icy wastes were trapped
Many explorers' ships and crews
Whose families had received no news
Of how they suffered and they died,
Unknown and unidentified.

At least they found John Franklin's grave —
A stern explorer, rash and brave:
For charts and maps his life he gave.

Though Europeans' success was heady,
The Inuit knew that coast already;
If Franklin with his dedication
Had sought out their co-operation,
He might have saved the situation.



SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN (1570-1635)

(Samuel de Champlain was an enthusiastic explorer and map-maker who founded France's first colony in the New World at Quebec in 1608.)

Champlain was eager to advance
His country's glory, in New France.
The best maps of the region then,
Came from his cartographic pen.
From Port-Royal, his earliest post,
He mapped the whole New England coast.

Explorers' trips, he realized,
Were best if locally advised.
So he made friendships, for insurance,
With the Algonquins and the Hurons.
When with these tribes his friendship grew
He travelled with them by canoe
And that was how he came to know
Lakes Huron and Ontario.
Then at another lake, said he:
"Let's call it Champlain, after me!"

Samuel was brave - among his stunts,
He shot the rapids, more than once.

Champlain was able to persuade
The French King that enormous trade
Would flow, if colonies were made.

He even thought it would be cute
When someone found the China route
To have on the Atlantic coast
A lucrative French Customs post.

After much thought, he chose the lands
Just in the place Quebec now stands.
His plans at first went topsy-turvy
When many settlers died of scurvy,
But Champlain never had a doubt:
He grew wheat, made a pool for trout,
And had a grand town plan laid out.

To make the winters seem less drear
He formed the Order of Good Cheer.
They'd hunt game for the festive table
And drink as much as they were able.

In transatlantic sailing ships
Champlain made over twenty trips,
And after one, he would decide:
"I'm forty - time I took a bride!"
The records, though, have never told
Just why he chose one, twelve years old.

Nor why, despite a happy life
In due course, with his grown-up wife,
He chose at last his will to vary
And leave all to the Virgin Mary.

He was exceedingly devout
And brought religious orders out
Among the tribes to make excursions
Attempting to promote conversions.

His colony survived a check -
The English capture of Quebec.
But then another deal was done:
Champlain was back, as Number One.
If thwarted, he cried: "Sacre Bleu! -
I'm here to act for Richelieu!"

He died, to solemn lamentation,
Where his first humble habitation
Had founded the Canadian nation.