



# Exploring American History

D.H. Montgomery

## Second Edition

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# Chapter 1

## Leif Ericsson (970–1020)

Captains of the waves we are—  
Kings of the seething foam—  
Warriors bold from the Norseland cold—  
Far o'er the sea we roam.

**The Norsemen.** Far away in the cold northern countries that we know as Denmark and Norway and Sweden lived a race of men who called themselves Vikings. They are often called Northmen or Norsemen, but I like best their own name for themselves. *Viking* means "son of the bay" or "raiding sailor," and the name helps us to know what kind of people they were—bold and hardy, fond of adventure, and full of love for the great blue ocean that surged into the thousands of bays along their shores. They built many ships and often made daring voyages to almost every part of Europe, where they often brutalized people who opposed their raids.

Would you like to see a Viking ship? It would not look much like one of our ships today, nor would it travel as fast as ships do now. The bow and the stern rose high out of the water, but the middle was lower and had no deck. Each vessel carried from thirty to sixty oarsmen who used oars twenty feet long. A single mast and only one sail, both of which could be taken down when not in use, completed what may seem to us a strange ship. But they were well built, and in them the Vikings traveled many weeks at a time upon the sea.

If we could have followed these Viking sailors, we would have found some of them going to England and to France, some to Ireland and the smaller islands nearby; but perhaps more than to any other place, they went to build up a Viking colony in Iceland. Their settlements there grew rapidly, and we may read about their farms and hay crops, their sheep and cattle, and—as we should expect—about their ships and trade with all the countries nearby.



Artist Conception of Danish Seamen

**The Vikings Travel to America.** Only two years after Iceland was settled, one of these ships was driven westward by a storm, until it reached the land we now call Greenland, and many years after that a Viking colony was established there. A few years later, a Viking ship sailed even farther into the unknown west than Greenland. The vessel had started on a voyage from Iceland to Greenland, and the captain had set out, steering by the sun and stars, Viking fashion. But a thick fog came, and neither sun nor stars could be seen. Still, on and on sailed the Viking ship, and after a time welcomed land was seen. It was not snowbound Greenland the ship had reached, however, but a low woody shore that looked very strange to the captain. So he turned back, and it was left for another man to land on the newfound shore.



The Northmen on the coast of Greenland

This man was Leif, son of Eric, or Leif Ericsson, as he is often called. In about the year A.D. 1000, Leif set out to search for the new land. After a short voyage, Leif and his thirty-five followers saw the shore and sailed along beside it for some distance. They called one place they saw Helluland because of its large, flat rocks. Another they called Markland because of its wooded land, and another Vinland because of the wild grapes the Vikings found there. In Vinland they spent the winter and, after going home in the spring, told fine stories of the pleasant land they had found.

Where was Vinland? It was in North America somewhere; most likely in Newfoundland—a province of Canada—since a Viking settlement site now called *L'Anse aux Meadows* was discovered there in 1960. We know, however, that the Vikings made no lasting settlements in Vinland. Some voyages were made to its shores to get wood, but battles with the Native Americans kept the Vikings from making homes in the land they had found. In time they stopped sailing to Vinland and deserted even the Greenland colonies, and the New World was left once more to the natives. The New World that the Vikings called Vinland was forgotten for over 400 years. Finally, in the year 1492, a brave explorer named Christopher Columbus rediscovered the land we call America.

**Summary.** The Norsemen or Vikings were some of the world's greatest sailors. They sailed from what are now the countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden on trading and raiding voyages throughout much of the North Atlantic and Mediterranean. They established settlements in England, France, Ireland, and elsewhere. They also discovered and established colonies on the islands of Iceland and Greenland. The Vikings even landed on the New World but were unable to establish any permanent settlements. It was not until the voyages of Columbus that Europe learned again of the new lands across the Atlantic Ocean.



Voyages of the Northmen

### Comprehension Questions

1. From where did the Viking people come?
2. What kind of people were they?
3. Describe the kind of ships that they built.
4. List and describe the three places Leif Ericsson found in North America.
5. In 1960, what Viking settlement was discovered in Newfoundland?
6. Why did the Vikings not establish any lasting settlements in America?



# Chapter 2

## Christopher Columbus (1451–1506)



Christopher Columbus (1451–1506)

**A Young Christopher Columbus.** Christopher Columbus, the discoverer of America, was born in Genoa, a seaport of Italy, more than 550 years ago. His father was a wool comber, separating fibers for spinning. Christopher did not want to learn that trade, but wanted to become a sailor. Seeing the boy's strong liking for the sea, his father sent him to a school where he could learn geography, map drawing, and whatever else might help him to become, someday, commander of a ship.

When he was fourteen Columbus went to sea. In those days, the Mediterranean Sea swarmed with warships and pirates. Every sailor, no matter if he was but a boy, had to stand ready to fight his way from port to port.

In this exciting life, full of adventure and of danger, Columbus grew to manhood. The rough experiences he then had did much to make him the brave, determined captain and explorer that he afterwards became.

According to some accounts, Columbus once had a desperate battle with a ship off the coast of Portugal. The fight lasted all day. At length, both vessels caught fire. Columbus jumped from his blazing ship into the sea and, catching hold of a floating oar, managed to swim to the shore about six miles away.



"By sailing west, I shall be able to reach the Indies."

He then went to the port of Lisbon. There he married the daughter of a famous sea captain. For a long time after his marriage Columbus earned his living partly by drawing maps, which he sold to commanders of vessels visiting Lisbon, and partly by making voyages to Africa, Iceland, and other lands.

**Columbus's Plan for Reaching the Indies.** The maps that Columbus made and sold were very different from those we now have. At that time, only half of the world had been discovered. Europe, Asia, and a small part of Africa were the primary places known. The maps that Columbus had might have shown the earth shaped like a ball, but he supposed it to be much smaller than

it really is. No one at this time had sailed around the globe. Therefore, no one knew what lands lay west of the broad Atlantic. For this reason we would look in vain on one of the maps drawn by Columbus for the great continents of North and South America or for Australia or the Pacific Ocean.



Are you interested in teaching children about the impact of the chief founders and builders of America? Then

*Exploring American History* is the book for you!

It is our goal with this textbook to acquaint students with the lives and impact of many of the critical people in American history. We hope this book will inspire students to search further into the details of the various personalities of America's history. We have sought within this book to bring out the influence of the Christian faith as it relates to the events and people of America's past.



We have made a number of improvements to the second edition of *Exploring American History*. Students will benefit from several new chapters, as well as revisions to the rest of the book. We have also added numerous illustrations, maps, and articles to make this edition even more interesting and informative to students. Whether using this book as a primary history book or as a supplemental text, students will benefit from this unique study of American history.



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