



## **Jacques Cartier**

**1491 - 1557**

**French Navigator Who Explored Canada  
Discovered the Saint Lawrence River and  
Founded a French Colony**

**JACQUES CARTIER WAS BORN** in the sea port of Saint-Malo, France, in 1491. Very little is known about his early life. Some historians think he might have traveled with **Giovanni da Verrazzano** on his voyage to the **New World** (North America) in

1524. No one is sure how he got his training, but he was a skilled navigator by the time he was chosen to explore for France.

**COMMISSIONED BY THE KING OF FRANCE:** By the 1530s, France wanted to take part in the exploration of the **New World**. In 1534, King Francis I selected Cartier to lead an expedition to North America.

The king had several goals in mind. He wanted Cartier to discover the **Northwest Passage**. In the early 1500s, many people believed that a passage from Europe to Asia existed through what is now Canada. They sought a sea route linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the islands of the Canadian Arctic. That would be a shorter route to the riches of China, and not require sailing around the South American continent.

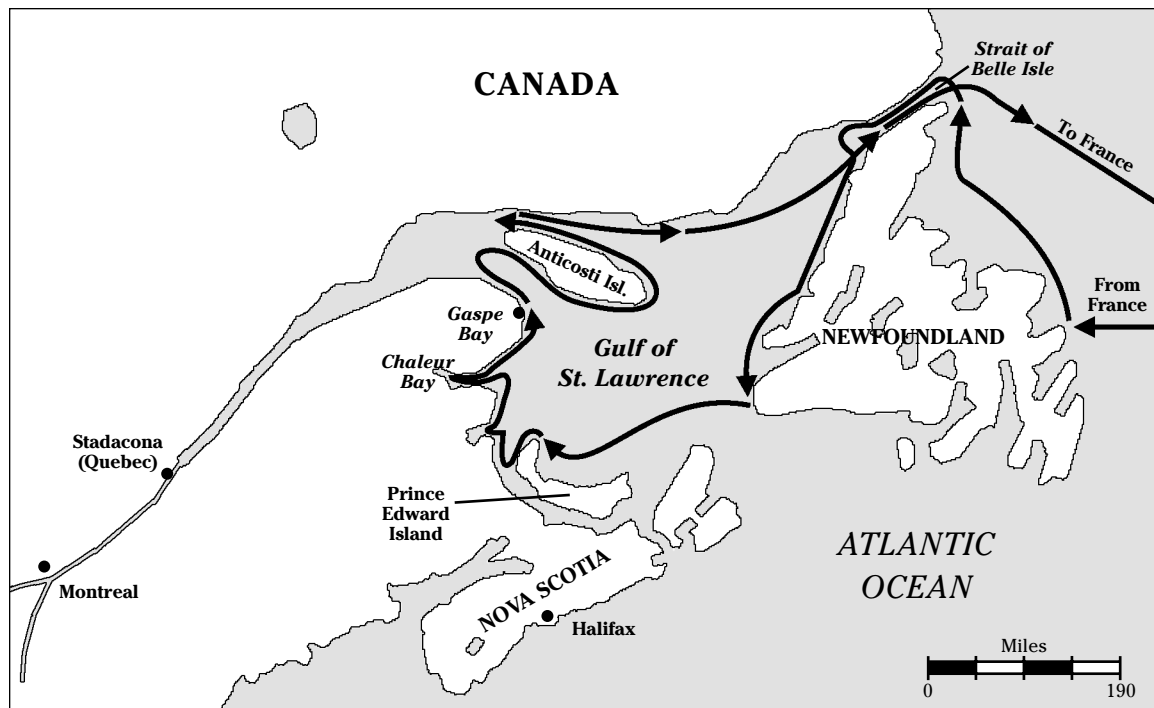
King Francis also knew of the gold and silver discovered by Spanish and Portuguese explorers. He wanted Cartier to explore the New World so the French could claim that kind of wealth.

**FIRST VOYAGE TO THE NEW WORLD:** Cartier left France in April 1534, with two ships and 61 men. They crossed the Atlantic in 20 days. The crew landed on Newfoundland. They explored the Strait of Belle Isle and raised a cross at Saint-Servan.

Sailing south, the ships headed for what is now Prince Edward Island. From there, they traveled north to Chaleur Bay. They met a friendly tribe of natives, the Micmacs, and traded with them.

Cartier continued sailing north, to what is now Gaspé Bay. There, they raised another cross and claimed the land for France. The ceremony troubled the local natives, who were Huron Indians from Stadacona (now the city of Québec). They were in the area

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*Cartier's first voyage, 1534.*

fishing, and they witnessed the ceremony. The local chief, named Donnacona, let Cartier know that the land belonged to his people.

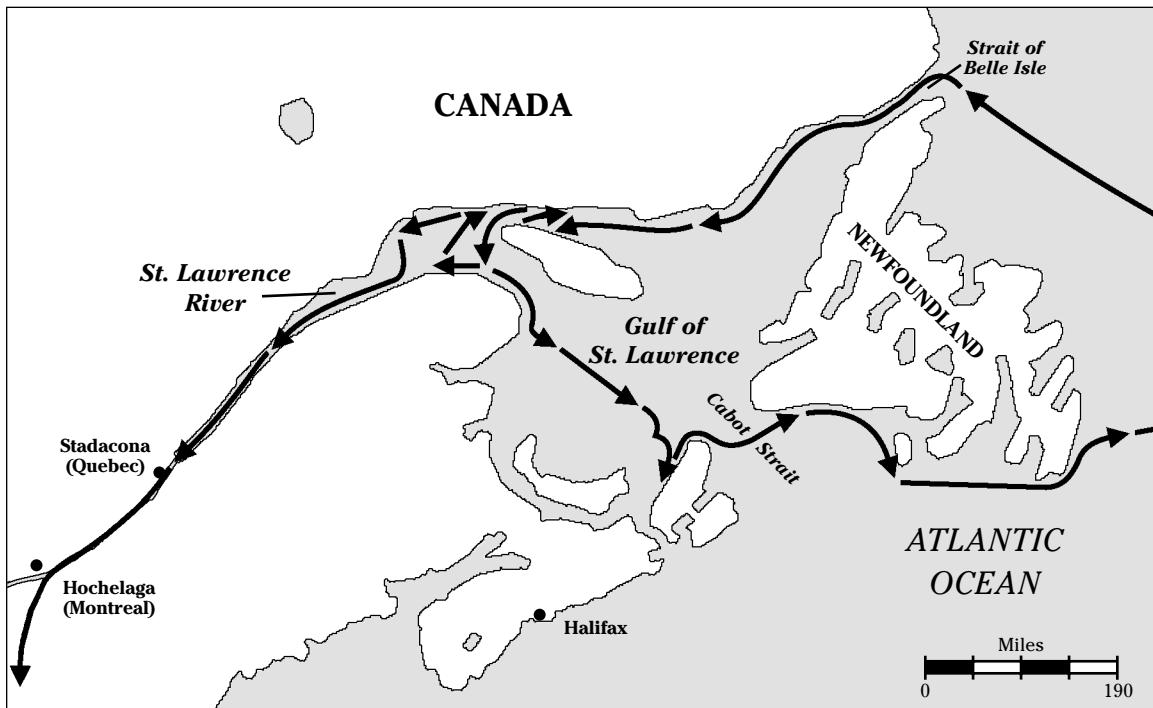
Cartier eased the tensions with the Huron. He persuaded Donnacona to send his two sons, Taignoagny and Domagaya, back to France with him. Donnacona agreed. Cartier headed back into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, then navigated the strait around Anticosti Island. The ships then set sail for France, reaching home in September.

**SECOND VOYAGE:** In May 1535 Cartier went to sea again, this time with three ships and 120 men. They landed in Newfoundland 50 days later. In August, he reached a bay he named for Saint Lawrence. Later mapmakers named a river, a gulf, and a major seaway for the saint.

Cartier reached the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. They sailed along the river to Stadacona, the home of the Hurons. Donnacona was reunited with his sons. Cartier continued sailing down the river, as far as the Indian city of Hochelaga, where Montreal now stands. They were greeted by 2,000 Indians.

In Hochelaga, Cartier heard about a famous city of great wealth, the Kingdom of Saguenay. It was supposedly down the river, but because of fierce rapids, Cartier couldn't continue. Before leaving, the Huron showed him a mountain, which he named "Mount Royal," or Montreal.

Cartier sailed back to Stadacona. He decided that they would spend the winter there. By mid-November, the ships were frozen in the ice. The winter was long and bitter. Some of the men developed scurvy. That is a disease caused by lack of Vitamin C. The natives



*Cartier's second voyage, 1535-1536.*

were able to help the Frenchmen, showing them how to brew a tea from cedar trees that stopped the disease.

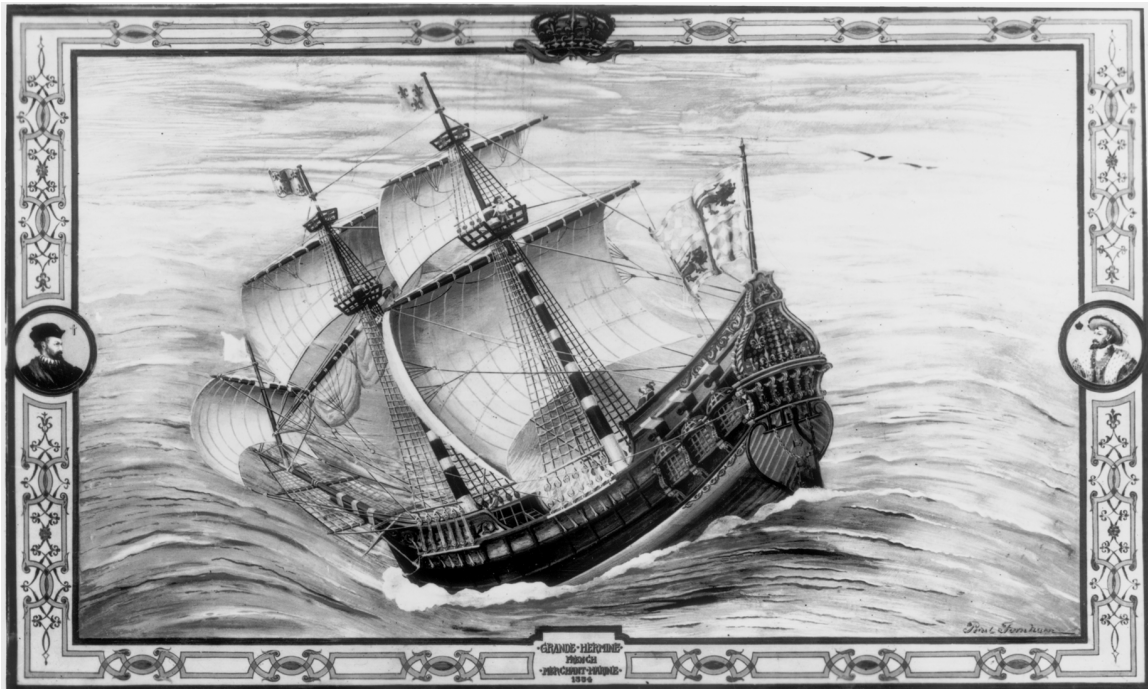
Throughout the winter, the Huron entertained the French with more tales of Saguenay. When spring came, Cartier decided to force Donnaconna, his sons, and other Hurons to return to France with him. He wanted them to “relate to the King the marvels he had seen in the western lands.”

On the return voyage, Cartier discovered the Cabot Strait. They reached France in July 1536. Donnaconna proved to be very popular with the French. The king was especially interested in the stories of Saguenay.

**THIRD VOYAGE:** Cartier’s next voyage took place in 1541. King Francis wanted him to found a French colony. He chose Cartier as the chief navigator, but not as the leader of the voyage. That job went to Jean-Francois de la Rocque de Roberval.

In May 1541, Cartier left France with five ships and 1,500 people. They carried enough food for two years. By that time, all but one member of the Huron tribe who had been forced to go to France had died. When Cartier met the new Huron chief, Agona, he told him only of the death of Donnaconna. Of the others, he said that they “had remained in France where they were living as great lords. They had married and had no desire to return to their country.”

The colonists founded their settlement at a place called Charlesbourg Royal, near Stadacona. They searched for Saguenay, but found nothing. What they thought were diamonds and gold turned out to be worthless fool’s gold. When they returned to Charlesbourg Royal, they found it in chaos. The settlement had



*Cartier and the Grande Hermine, one of the ships from his voyage of 1535-1536.*

been attacked and some of the colonists were killed, probably by angry Huron Indians.

Cartier and the remaining settlers headed back to France in 1542. In Newfoundland, they met Roberval's ship. He demanded that Cartier return to the settlement. Cartier disobeyed, slipping out at night for home.

Cartier returned to France and never went to sea again. He was never punished for not following orders. Roberval went on to Charlesbourg Royal. But within a year, he realized that the settlement was a failure. All the crew returned to France.

Cartier retired to his estate in Saint-Malo. He wrote a book about his adventures that was published in 1545. He died on his estate in 1557, at the age of 66.

## JACQUES CARTIER

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**HIS DISCOVERY:** At a time when Spain and Portugal were the major powers in world exploration, Cartier made major discoveries for France. The French later became the leading colonial power in the area he explored.

### WORLD WIDE WEB SITES:

[http://www.civilization.ca/vmnf/explor/carti\\_e2.html](http://www.civilization.ca/vmnf/explor/carti_e2.html)

<http://www.mariner.org/age/cartier.html>

<http://www.win.tue.nl/~engels/discovery/cartier.html>

