

### Learn about Leif Erikson at your Library

In 1964 the observance of Leif Erikson Day, through an annual proclamation, began with President Lyndon B. Johnson. Despite over 50 years of observing Leif Erikson Day on October 9th in the United States, not many Americans know much about this Norse explorer who became known as the first European to land in North America.

According to a 2015 article in Iceland Magazine, Leif Erikson (known in Icelandic as Leifur Eiriksson) Day is commemorated on October 9<sup>th</sup> recognizing the beginning of Norwegian migration to the US on that day in 1825 on the ship Restauration. Iceland Magazine emphasizes that this creates a misunderstanding, implying that Erikson was Norwegian, when he is actually Icelandic. While his father, Erik the Red, was Norwegian, Erikson was born in Iceland to an Icelandic mother.

AtoZ the World, a database you can access with your library card, sheds light on Leif Erikson in the Historical Timeline section of the country of Iceland. After Erikson's father was exiled from Iceland for three years, he founded a settlement in Greenland. Erikson spent many years in Greenland with his family, having never actually lived in Norway. Around the year 1000, Erikson reached North America, founding a Norse settlement on the coast of Newfoundland, Canada.

Norway's Historical Timeline on AtoZ the World, also mentions Erik the Red and Leif Erikson. According to this timeline, Erik the Red was exiled to Iceland from Norway for killing two men. Then, in Iceland, he kills more men and is also exiled for three years. This is when he explores and establishes settlements in Greenland. These colonies help alleviate overcrowding in Iceland, but don't last past the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the island becomes too cold to be hospitable. Erikson is also credited here for discovering an island off the coast of North America, which eventually is called Newfoundland. Here it is mentioned that Erikson does not establish a permanent settlement on this island, named then as Vinland.

Interestingly, Canada's Historical Timeline mentions Bjarni Herjolfsson, also a Norseman, who is blown off course on his way from Iceland to Greenland and lands on Newfoundland in 985. This is around 15 years before Erikson's journey. Herjolfsson is said to have established a colony there that persisted for around 60 years. More light is shed on the settlement debate here with the explanation that Erikson attempted to establish permanent settlements, but they were unsuccessful due to an inhospitable climate and "even less hospitable indigenous people."

"Erik the Red; Eriksson, Leif; and Eriksdottir, Freydis" by Old Worlds to New provides more details on Erikson and the history of Viking exploration of North America. In this article, Herjolfsson is credited with giving Erikson the idea to explore North America, by telling him of his experience being blown off course on his way to Greenland. In this account, Herjolfsson, doesn't actually land on the islands of Newfoundland or establish settlements. This article can be found on the Biography Reference Bank, which is provided by the state of Nebraska, and accessed using your Nebraska Driver's License number or by calling the library at 402-564-7116 for the current password.

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