sequence of designed rural landscapes of grid-pattern roads, fields, and settlements that stretch almost uninterrupted from southern Ontario and the Alleghenies westward to the Pacific. In urban North America, the rectangular street and block patterns and regular naming and numbering of streets are a more widespread expression of urbanism than the late-appearing skyscraper. Design can also be observed in the continued pattern of regionally diverse folk housing styles, as well as in a myriad of borrowed urban architectural styles. Regional landscapes, therefore, continue to survive despite the homogenizing influences of historic national survey systems and contemporary urban life, as any trip to Quebec, the Appalachians, Louisiana, or New Mexico will attest.

Ideas of separation and segregation are also well expressed in the landscape. We can observe the dismal results of Native American removal to western reservations, while we appreciate their potential for fostering cultural survival. If the slave plantation is a thing of the past, we can interpret the continued segregation of African Americans in inner cities and whites in the suburbs as a reflection of the enduring racial divisions of American society that compound the urban-suburban tensions of modern metropolitan life. We can appreciate also the idea of conservation on a continent that has experienced more rapid and extensive resource exploitation than any other. The creation of wilderness and recreation areas, national parks, national forests, national seashores, and wildlife management areas reflects abiding concern in the management, if not always the preservation, of landscape and nature. And ultimately, on a continent that is seemingly notorious for lack of a sense of place or a sense of past, we can acknowledge the survival of landscape relics from previous settlement eras, from historic structures to “living farms,” from factories and foundries to sanitized colonial townscapes, that still reflect on the landscape the forces of change, paradox, and contradiction that continue to reshape North America.

**ADDITIONAL READING**


——. 1977. This Scene of Man: The Role and Structure of the City in the Geography of Western Civilization. New York: Harper & Row.
PART II

COLONIZATION

1490s–1770s

If the soil were as good as the harbours, it would be a blessing; but the land should not be called the New Land, being composed of stones and horrible rugged rocks; for along the whole of the north shore [of the Gulf of St. Lawrence], I did not see one cart-load of earth and yet I landed in many places. . . . In fine, I am rather inclined to believe that this is the land God gave to Cain.

Jacques Cartier, *Journal*, 1535

Thus I have given a succinct account of the Indians; happy, I think, in their simple State of Nature, and in their enjoyment of Plenty, without the Curse of Labour. They have on several accounts reason to lament the arrival of the Europeans, by whose means they seem to have lost their Felicity, as well as their Innocence. The English have taken away a great part of their Country, and consequently made everything less plenty amongst them. They have introduc'd Drunkenness and Luxury amongst them, which have multiply'd their Wants, and put them upon desiring a thousand things, they never dreamt of before.

Robert Beverley, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, 1705

Why should we, in the Sight of Superior Beings, darken its People? Why increase the sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an Opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys, of increasing the lovely White and Red? But perhaps I am partial to the Complexion of my Country, for such kind of Partiality is natural to Mankind.

Benjamin Franklin, *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*, 1751
European Encounters: 
Discovery and Exploration

LOUIS DE VORSEY

One of the most colorful and exciting stories in humankind's history describes the discovery and exploration of North America by Europeans. The Age of Discovery and Exploration is almost universally acknowledged as a major temporal division, employed to help organize and focus understanding of humanity's march through time. Its significance to historical geography derives from what it can reveal about areas discovered, the cultural groups responsible for the modification of those areas, and the resultant cultural landscapes. As Carl Sauer put it, in 1925:

Historical geography may be considered as the series of changes which the cultural landscapes have undergone and therefore involves the reconstruction of past cultural landscapes. Of special concern is the catalytic relation of civilized man to area and the effects of the replacement of cultures. From this difficult and little-touched field alone may be gained a full realization of the development of the present cultural landscape out of earlier cultures and the natural landscape. (Land and Life, 344)

The North American cultural landscape, in all its incredible richness of diverse patterns, forms a document. Reading it is challenging because it is not like a modern printed document that reveals its message easily. Rather, today's landscape is similar to ancient parchments, ordinarily goat- or sheepskins, called palimpsests. Parchment, being expensive and durable, was seldom thrown away and was used over and over again. Scholars and monks merely scraped the ink off portions they wanted to change ("palimpsest" comes from the Greek for "scraped again") or crossed out errors or old ideas and introduced their changes and corrections between the lines of written text. The phrase "to read between the lines" is commonly used to indicate the search for hidden or deeper meaning. Because the scraped erasures and corrections were imperfectly done, it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts. The patterns of trails, streets, power-line grids, railways, highways, fields, and farmsteads contributing to today's urban and rural landscapes can be viewed as modern interlinings and glosses on a centuries-old landscape palimpsest.

CREATION OF THE ABORIGINAL LANDSCAPE

The first bands of Old World hunters spreading across the broad, low-lying belt of tundra, inadequately described as the Bering Land Bridge, found North America in a truly natural state. As they moved south to exploit the continent some 20,000 to 30,000 years ago, they began to alter their surroundings and permanently change ecological relationships. Their numbers were small, but they possessed and made wide use of fire for major landscape modification.

The people who erroneously came to be called Indians by the first Europeans who met them—"Native Americans" today, or, in Canada, "First Nations"—continued to add their cultural signatures and messages to North America's landscape palimpsest. During the centuries that followed, majestic earthworks, massive effigies, and mounds were raised; palisaded villages were built; fields and trails were hewn from the forest; fish traps were constructed in rivers, lakes, and coastal lagoons; and everywhere fire was deliberately loosed on the land to drive game, clear undergrowth, and achieve other desired alterations. Giovanni da Verrazano, whose first landing near Cape Fear, North Carolina, was guided by Native fires, was only one of the early 16th-century visitors to North
America who drew attention to their recurrent use of fire as a tool in landscape modification and management.

As their cultures evolved and their numbers grew, the Native Americans altered their habitat in major ways. The sum total of these alterations to the natural state of the continent by the time of the first European contacts is still to be determined accurately. One thing is clear, however: eastern North America was far from being a primeval forest when Europeans reached it in the 16th century. On the contrary, what the European explorers found and reported is best described as an aboriginal landscape—a palimpsest already inscribed with patterns and forms reflecting its cultural use by Natives for whom it had been a home for centuries. North America was a “New Land” only to the Europeans. In the words, in 1964, of John Collier, longtime U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, “At the time of white arrival there was no square mile unoccupied or unused. . . . The million Indians of the United States and Alaska were formed within more than six hundred distinct societies, in geographical situations ranging from temperate oceansides to arctic ice, from humid swamps to frozen tundras, from eastern woodlands to western deserts” (101–2).

It is through the eyes and accounts of the early explorers that we can gain glimpses of the landscapes created by native North Americans before Europeans began to exploit the continent’s resources. Great care must be taken in interpreting their texts and maps, however, for we must be aware of the motives and aspirations of the individual explorers who wrote and drew them. Furthermore, nuances of meaning may be lost in translation, and changes take place in all languages, including those of cartography, over long periods of time. Giovanni da Verrazano, for example, was obviously trying to create a favorable impression in the mind of his sponsor, the king of France, when he penned the earliest detailed description of “the Country of Refugio”—around modern Newport, Rhode Island—which he visited for more than two weeks in 1524.

Many times we were from five to six leagues inland, which we found as pleasing as it can be to narrate, adapted to every kind of cultivation: grain, wine, oil. Because in that place the fields are from 25 to 30 leagues wide, open and devoid of every impediment of trees, of such fertility that any seed in them would produce the best crops. Entering then into the woods, all of which are penetrable by any numerous army in any way whatsoever, and where trees, oaks, cypress, and others are unknown in our Europe. . . . Animals there are in very great number, stags, deer, lynx, and other species. (cited in Hoffman 1961, 111)

But when due allowance is made for his hyperbole and obviously favorable spin, one can gain a considerable amount of insight concerning the landscape that had been shaped by the Natives in one of the most densely inhabited parts of the continent:

We saw their habitations, circular in form, of 14 to 15 paces compass, made from semi-circles of wood separated one from the other . . . covered with mats of straw ingeniously worked, which protect them from rain and wind. . . . They change said houses from one place to another according to the season. . . . There live in each a father and family to a very large number, so that we saw 25 and 30 souls. Their food is like the others; of pulse [suc- tosh] (which they produce with more system of culture than the others, observing the full moon, the rising of the Pleiades, and many customs derived from the ancients), also of the chase and fish. (Hoffman 1961, 111)

At a landfall near Casco Bay in present-day southern Maine, Verrazano reported a rather different landscape:

We found a high land and full of very thick forests, the trees of which were pines, cypress [red cedar] and such as grow in cold regions. The people . . . were full of uncouthness and vices, so barbarous that we were never able, with howsoever many signs we made them, to have any intercourse with them. . . . If, trading at any time with them, we desired their things, they came to the shore of the sea upon some rock where it was very steep and we remaining in the small boat—with a cord let down to us what they wished to give, continually crying on land that we should not approach, giving quickly the barter, nor taking in exchange for it except knives, hooks for fishing, and sharp metal. They had no regard for courtesy, and when they had nothing more to exchange, at their departing the men made at us all the signs of contempt and shame which any brute creature could make. (Hoffman 1961, 111)
Verrazano named the area Land of the Bad People in his report to the king.

These extracts from Verrazano’s report suggest a number of hypotheses concerning the true nature of the geography of aboriginal North America. The landscape of southern New England was greatly altered by its Native occupants armed with fire. "Fields ... from 25 to 30 leagues wide" sounds exaggerated but is clear evidence of their achievement. It is probable that many areas inhabited by Native Americans exhibited a relatively open, parklike appearance, although forests still constituted the dominant land cover of most of the Atlantic seaboard. The behavior of the Natives—Verrazano’s "bad people"—suggests further hypotheses. Could it be that these hunter-gatherers were wary because they had already encountered Europeans and had been mistreated? Although not universally accepted, there is evidence that points to the presence of European vessels on the fishing banks off northeastern North America as much as a century before Verrazano’s voyage. Perhaps John Cabot’s 1497 landfall was not the first for modern Europeans on these coasts.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE

One of the great disappointments of the historical record is that few, if any, of the early European explorers possessed either the time or the training to record the subtle cultural differences and nonmaterial nuances of Native social and political life. As a consequence, we must view the period of original contact between the people of the Old and New Worlds through a dark and often distorted lens. By the time that more careful and complete records of their beliefs, lifestyles, and landscapes were being compiled, the Native Americans had already begun to suffer the catastrophic fatal shocks introduced by Old World epidemic diseases such as smallpox, measles, and influenza.

Thomas Harriot, a member of Sir Walter Raleigh’s abortive Virginia settlement in the 1580s, described his visits to the Native villages on the coastal plain of North Carolina. He mentioned that he and his English companions "sought by all means possible to win them by gentleness" but that, "within the few days after our departure from every such town, the people began to die very fast, and many in short space, in some towns about twenty, in some forty, and in one six score, which in truth was very many in respect of their numbers" (Corbett 1953, 97). Any doubt that this postcontact decimation of the Natives was caused by some infectious disease being carried by members of Harriot’s party is dispelled by his further observation that "this happened in no place that we could learn, but where we had been. . . . The disease also was so strange, that they neither knew what it was, nor how to cure it, the like by report of the oldest men in the country never happened before, time out of mind" (Corbett 1953, 97).

This example of the impact of disease typifies an important aspect of what historian Alfred Crosby investigated in his study The Columbian Exchange. Thanks to the acceptance of Crosby’s work, the term “Columbian exchange” is now widely used to describe the complex and many-faceted chain of ecological exchanges and impacts that began with Columbus. As Crosby points out regarding Columbus’s 1492 landfall, “The two worlds which God had cast asunder, were reunited, and the two worlds which were so very different, began on that day to become alike. That trend toward biological homogeneity is one of the most important aspects of the history of life on this planet since the retreat of the continental glaciers” (Crosby 1972, 3).

Native Americans, like the aborigines of Australia, had enjoyed the ultimately perilous, long-term isolation from the people inhabiting the Old World of Afro-Eurasia and its fringing islands. As a consequence, they had not inherited the resistance to disease that had evolved in Old World populations. Even commonplace diseases, such as whooping cough, scarlet fever, and chicken pox, proved to be devastating scourges when introduced to vulnerable populations for the first time.

It is tempting to hypothesize that the “bad people” of Verrazano’s account were aware of the doleful consequences of close-up, hand-to-hand exchange with Europeans. Perhaps they possessed the sort of awareness described by French Jesuit missionaries almost a century later. They wrote that the Natives are astonished and often complain that, since the French mingle with and carry on trade with them, they are dying fast and the population is
thinning out. For they assert that, before this association and intercourse, all their countries were very populous and they tell how one by one, the different coasts according as they have begun to traffic with us, have been more reduced by disease. (Crosby 1972, 41)

Once begun, the Columbian exchange could not be reversed; the New World and the Old World were launched on an inexorable course toward today’s global village.

PRE-COLUMBIAN CONTACTS BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW WORLDS

Hardly a month goes by that the news media do not report some new evidence or theory concerning a pre-Columbian “discovery” of the New World. Many verge on the bizarre and fail to bear up under even mild scientific scrutiny. Some, however, spawn fascinating and often long-lived debates that add spice to the history of discovery.

The Kensington stone, found in the small Minnesota farming community of that name in 1898, bore Scandinavian markings reporting that 8 Swedes and 22 Norwegians from Vinland had been there in the year 1362, a full 130 years prior to Columbus’s first landfall in the Bahamas. Careful linguistic analysis showed that the Kensington stone was fraudulent, very probably inscribed in 1898, the year of its alleged discovery. Exactly why this elaborate hoax was prepared and perpetrated remains unclear. Still, the debate waxed and waned for a half-century, and the episode can still enliven discussions and stir Nordic pride among many residents of the upper Midwest.

The Vinland map, owned by Yale University, has likewise stirred debate. Amid fanfare and the widest possible news media attention, the Yale University Press chose Columbus’s birthday in 1965 to present publicly their scholarly study entitled The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation. In this handsome and well-illustrated volume, three internationally respected scholars discussed the map that was being presented to the world as “the earliest known and indubitable cartographic representation of any part of the Americas.” The Vinland map is an elliptically shaped world image that includes the western ocean (Atlantic) with delineations of Iceland, Greenland, and a large island or landmass identified as “Island of Vinland, discovered by Bjarni and Leif in company.” The analysis of the map and the document with which it had once been bound—the “Tartar Relation”—led to the conclusion that both map and text had been copied in about 1440 from earlier originals.

That Norsemen had visited North America as much as 500 years before Columbus’s voyage was not a new idea. The Icelandic sagas and the archeological finds at L’Anse aux Meadows on the north coast of Newfoundland about 1970 had provided convincing evidence. What was new was the fact that a map dating from before 1492 showed a land called Vinland in the position of North America. In the words of Yale University Press releases, the Vinland map was “the most important cartographic discovery of the century.” Not all scholars were convinced of the map’s authenticity, however. The provenance of the map was shadowy, if not suspect. It had been bought from an unidentified owner in Europe then resold to a wealthy anonymous buyer, who gave it to Yale. Seaver, writing in 1997, argued that a German Jesuit priest and map scholar drew the Vinland map in the 1930s. If she is correct, Yale is custodian of one of the greatest scholarly hoaxes of all time.

What can be determined and generally accepted with respect to the Norse contacts with North America in the period around a.d. 1000? First, the historical record makes clear that the peoples of northern Europe in the early Middle Ages were an extremely energetic and venturous group. The progenitors of the peoples we now know as Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes appear to have poured forth from their northern homelands in a number of waves from the 8th to the 11th centuries. What triggered these movements is not entirely clear. Some suggest that overpopulation may have been the stimulus for sea roving and migration; others hold that political unrest, stirred by unpopular and repressive rulers, provided the impetus.

The western wing of this Norse expansion surged beyond continental Europe to reach and colonize the remote shores of Iceland in the 9th century. From Iceland, the next step was to the largely ice-covered island that the outlawed Eric the Red named Greenland to encourage
others to follow and join in the settlement he pioneered. In time, two Norse communities—East Settlement and West Settlement—were founded on the coast of southern Greenland (fig. 2.1).

Like their relatives in northern Europe, the settlers of Iceland and Greenland were pagans who worshipped the old Norse gods Odin, Freya, and Thor. According to many experts, Leif Ericson brought Christianity to Greenland from Norway in the same year he is believed to have sighted Vinland. According to interpretations of the Icelandic sagas, Norway’s King Olaf converted Leif and sent him to spread Christianity to Greenland. In the words of the saga:

The king provided him with a priest and various other holy men to baptize folk there and instruct them in the true faith. Leif set sail for Greenland that summer [A.D. 1000], and while at sea picked up a ship’s crew of men who lay helpless there on a wreck. On this same journey he found Vinland the Good. He reached Greenland at the end of the summer and went to the lodge of Brattahild with Eric his father. From this time forward men called him Leif the Lucky, but his father contended that one thing cancelled out the other, in that Leif had rescued a ship’s company and saved the men’s lives, but had also introduced a man of mischief [as Eric styled the priest] into Greenland. (Quinn 1979, 1: 33)

In spite of reactionaries like Eric, the pagan status quo gave way to the zeal of the early Christian missionaries. Churches were built, and by 1126 an ecclesiastical jurisdiction was established in the East Settlement to provide for the spiritual needs of the almost 10,000 Greenland colonists.

Whatever the specific dates and details concerned with the Norse discovery of North America may be, one thing appears reasonably clear: the Greenland colonists, and not the Viking kingdoms in Europe, provided the manpower and equipment that made New World contacts a reality. Further, the small numbers of
Greenlanders and their limited resource base soon came under stress, which eventually led to their loss of contact with Europe and ultimate extinction. Carl Sauer is only one of many scholars who have speculated on the reasons for the decline of the Greenland colonies. The mystery of Vinland and its Norse colonists will be understood only when the larger mystery of the decline and extinction of the Greenland settlements is solved.

It is best to keep an open mind on the whole subject of pre-Columbian contacts with America. That such contacts took place seems certain. Exactly who made them and when and where they occurred represent challenges to researchers in a number of historical disciplines. Most scholars would agree that impacts of those early contacts were probably very limited compared with the revolutionary character of the impacts that flowed from the European rediscovery of the New World spearheaded by Columbus.

**A THEORY OF EXPLORATION**

J. D. Overton, writing in the *Journal of Historical Geography*, correctly criticized the traditional narrative approach that has characterized most writing on the history of exploration. He urged that geographical exploration be studied in its widest context with greater emphasis placed on its causes and effects, rather than simply on the colorful personalities and dramatic events that have dominated most literature in the field.

In developing a theoretical model of a more process-oriented approach to exploration, Overton was careful to distinguish between geographical discovery and exploration. Discoverers, he argued, merely find or uncover places; it remains for explorers to begin the continuing assessment and evaluation. He wrote that “whether an area is ‘known’ or ‘unknown’ depends on how much knowledge and what type of knowledge is required.” Reassessments and reevaluations of areas for newly determined purposes or needs are thus just as legitimate for study as are the reports of the first explorers or surveyors who provided the earliest descriptions or maps of those areas. Exploration, in Overton’s scheme, implies an intention that results in “a conscious search for knowledge within and about imperfectly known areas.” Thus, Colum-
the culture group and age to which they belong, as well as from their personal backgrounds, beliefs, aspirations, and values. These can be thought of as forming selective filters or lenses through which passes the information gleaned from the exploratory process. Overton’s model forms, he wrote, “a more holistic perspective, stressing the links between the different facets of the exploration process and placing exploration in its broader economic and social context.”

EUROPE’S ATLANTIC OUTLOOK RESUMES

The many original impulses leading Europeans to the discovery and exploration of North America can be compared with the roots of a large tree, which can be followed in any number of directions. The Age of Discovery had complex and interlocking origins that touched almost every facet of European life and existence. Only a few of the many rich themes elucidating the causes and effects of the European New World exploration can be considered here. Important among these themes is the emergence of the Atlantic outlook and orientation that came to characterize and eventually dominate the lives of western Europeans. By the middle of the 17th century, the Atlantic Ocean ceased to be the limit of the known world and became another Mediterranean—a sea within the lands—to those Europeans now occupying or exploiting practically its whole littoral (fig. 2.1).

To understand how this came about, it is necessary to appreciate that the orientation of Europe toward the Mediterranean Sea and the East did not end with the decline of Roman control and the onset of the so-called Dark Ages. Crusaders from the far corners of Christian Europe and merchant travelers, such as Marco Polo, were familiar with Middle Eastern caravansaries, where luxuries and indispensable spices from the East Indies and Cathay (as eastern Asia was known) were traded. European demand for these commodities grew, if for no other reason than increasing population. It is estimated that, between the beginning of the Christian era and A.D. 1500, the world’s population doubled from 250 million