

**CATECHISM OF THE HISTORY  
OF NEWFOUNDLAND: WITH AN  
INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER ON  
THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649348459

Catechism of the History of Newfoundland: With an Introductory Chapter on the Discovery of America by Wm. Chas St. John

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**WM. CHAS ST. JOHN**

**CATECHISM OF THE HISTORY  
OF NEWFOUNDLAND: WITH AN  
INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER ON  
THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA**



CATECHISM

OF THE

History of Newfoundland,

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

ON THE

DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

BY THE

ANCIENT SCANDINAVIANS.

---

INTENDED CHIEFLY FOR THE USE OF SCHOOLS.

---

BY WM. CHAS. ST. JOHN.

(LATE U. S. VICE-CONSUL FOR THE BAY OF CONCEPTION.)

---

REVISED EDITION.

---

BOSTON:

PRESS OF GEORGE C. RAND, CORNHILL.

1856.

TO

JOHN IRVING BODDICK, ESQUIRE,

PRINCIPAL OF THE HARBOR GRACE GRAMMAR SCHOOL,

THE FOLLOWING SHEETS

ARE CORDIALLY DEDICATED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

## PREFATORY NOTE.

---

SOME years ago, while residing in Newfoundland, I was induced to publish a brief history of that country drawn up in the catechetical form, and adapted to the use of schools. It got into pretty general circulation, and was instrumental, I believe, in removing a vast deal of ignorance which until then prevailed respecting one of the oldest dependencies of the British Crown.

Having now revised the original edition, brought down the narrative to the close of last year, and prefixed an Introductory Chapter containing matter which, I presume, will be interesting to readers generally, I again offer the little manual to the public, with the honest persuasion that the time bestowed upon it has not been thrown away. At all events, this or a similar synopsis is indispensably necessary in the schools of Newfoundland.

W. C. ST. JOHN.

*Boston, January, 1855.*

## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

---

It was long rumored that the Continent of America had been known to Europeans hundreds of years prior to the time of Columbus. Traditionary tales of transatlantic voyages performed by the Scandinavians in the tenth century, were handed down from father to son for many generations. Some of these, it must be confessed, were so vague and marvellous as wholly to belong to the region of fable; while others were set forth with such minuteness of detail, and accompanied by so many statements of an astronomical as well as a geographical character, all agreeing with indubitable facts brought to light by subsequent discovery, that it was difficult to evade the force of evidence which such accumulated testimonies set before us.

At the instance, we believe, of that venerable philosopher and eminent scientific traveller, ALEXANDER



VON HUMBOLDT, this curious and interesting question has been investigated afresh by the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries; and it would certainly appear from the researches of these celebrated men, notwithstanding the obscurities which enveloped certain portions of the narratives which claimed their attention, that the Northern Atlantic had been crossed on several occasions at this early period, first accidentally, and from stress of weather, by which the voyagers were carried westward far beyond the limits of their destined haven; and afterwards, by the voluntary undertaking of enterprising men who, like their renowned successors Columbus and Cabot, fearlessly launched away upon the bosom of the deep in quest of distant and unexplored regions.

The earliest account on record among the numerous documents to which the above-named society had access, is that of a voyage performed by one Biarne, son of Heriulf Bardson, a follower of Eric the Red, who, in 986, emigrated from Iceland to Greenland, where he formed a settlement. Biarne happened to be absent on a voyage to Norway at the time of his father's removal, but on his return home he immediately resolved to rejoin his parent though unacquainted with the sea which he had to traverse. The result of this bold attempt is circumstantially narrated in the before named documents, and we cannot do better than quote the substance of those papers as given in the *London Geographical Journal*, for 1838:—

“They (Biarne and attendants) set sail, but met with northerly winds and fogs, and after many days’

sailing they knew not whither they had been carried. When the weather again cleared up, they at last saw a land which was without mountains, overgrown with wood, and having many gentle elevations. As this land did not correspond to the description of Greenland, they left it to larboard, and continued sailing two days, when they saw another land which was flat, and overgrown with wood. From thence they stood out to sea, and sailed three days with a S. W. wind, when they saw a third land, which was high and mountainous and covered with icebergs (glaciers); they coasted along the shore and saw that it was an island. They did not go on shore, as Biarne did not find the country to be inviting. Bearing away from this island, they stood out to sea with the same wind, and after four days' sailing with fresh gales they reached Heriulfnes in Greenland."

"About ten years after this," continues the same authority, "Biarne paid a visit to Eric, Earl of Norway, and told him of his voyage, and of the unknown lands he had discovered. He was blamed by many for not having examined these countries more accurately. On his return to Greenland, there was much talk about undertaking a voyage of discovery. Leif, a son of Eric the Red, bought Biarne's ship, and equipped it with thirty-five men, among whom was a German named Tyrker, who had long resided with his father, and who had been very fond of Leif in his childhood. In the year 1000 they commenced the projected voyage, and came first to the land which Biarne had seen last. They cast anchor and went on shore."

The description which these navigators gave of this country, and of the various lands which they visited in succession as they coasted along shore, perfectly agreed with what had previously been given by the adventurous Biarne. Leif, however, pushed his discoveries much farther than Biarne — reached a land that abounded in grapes, to which he gave the name of Vinland. Here he remained during the winter, and returned to Greenland the spring following.

In 1002, a brother of Leif's, named Thorwald, undertook a voyage to the far west. He and his companions arrived safely at Vinland; they found, and for a time occupied, the very huts, or Leifsbooths, which their predecessors had erected; explored much of the country, continuing therein two whole years; and finally, coasting their way eastward towards home, fell in with the Skrellings, or Esquimaux, with whom, as the chronicler relates, "they came to blows," in which rencontre Thorwald lost his life, and his remains were buried on a promontory which he had admired a day or two before for its picturesque beauty. Upon this promontory, or point of land, the survivors erected a number of crosses, naming it Crossness "in all time coming." We are told further that Thorstein Ericson, a brother of the deceased, fitted out a ship with the view to fetching home the remains of Thorwald, but was frustrated in the attempt by a succession of *adverse* gales which eventually drove him upon the western settlement of Greenland, where he died during the winter.

The next year, one Thorfinn, a person of great sub-