

Leiv Eiriksson Discovers America

(A.D. 1000)

Leiv Eiriksson, also known as “Leiv the Lucky,” is often credited as the first European to visit North America. Born in Iceland in approximately A.D. 980, he spent most of his life in Greenland, where his father, Erik the Red, founded the first European colony. According to one Norse saga, Eiriksson landed on the eastern coast of North America by accident. In this story, Eiriksson, converted to Christianity by King Olaf I while visiting Norway, sails off course on his return to Greenland to proselytize for his new faith. A more reliable saga claims that Eiriksson intentionally voyaged to North America after hearing of the new land from another mariner, who sighted the continent but did not disembark. In either case, Eiriksson’s accounts of his discovery inspired several Norse colonization attempts over the next decade.

During his North American adventure, Eiriksson and his men went ashore in several different places, and he named the various regions he encountered Helluland (Flat Stone Land), Markland (Wood Land), and Vinland (Wine Land). The exact location of Eiriksson’s New World landfall is unknown; geographers and historians have placed it variously between Labrador and the Chesapeake Bay. The most likely present-day location for the ancient Vinland seems to be Nova Scotia or Newfoundland.

L *Leiv Eiriksson Discovers America A.D. 1000* depicts the bold Norse sea captain commanding his men as they first sight the shores of the New World. A group of “Norwegian Friends of America,” organized by Dr. Alf Bjercke of Oslo, presented the painting to the people of the United States. At a March 23, 1936 ceremony in the Capitol’s National Statuary Hall, the painting was said to celebrate the first Norse immigrant to this country and to commemorate the fact that a Norseman was the first European to set foot on American soil. Senator Alben W. Barkley of Kentucky and House Speaker Joseph W. Byrns accepted the work on behalf of the U.S. Congress. The Joint Committee on Arrangements that was established for the ceremony was made up of senators and representatives of Norwegian descent.



This 1893 painting of explorer Leiv Eiriksson by Christian Krohg was the inspiration for the Senate’s painting by Per Lasson Krohg.

(Photo: J. Lathion, © Nasjonalgalleriet)

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Per Lasson Krohg (1889–1965)

after the original by his father Christian Krohg (1852–1925)

Oil on canvas, 1936

67 x 102 inches (170.2 x 259.1 cm)

Signed and dated (lower right corner): EFTER / C. KRohg / 1893 / VED / P. KRohg / 1936

Gift of the Norwegian Friends of the United States of America, 1936

Accepted by joint resolution dated March 18, 1936

Cat. no. 33.00009



The painting is a copy by Norwegian painter and muralist Per Krohg of an 1893 work by his father, Christian Krohg (1852–1925). The original (9 feet by 18 feet in size), which was initially exhibited at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, currently hangs in the National Gallery in Oslo.

Per Krohg, who was born in Oslo and studied with his father and French impressionist Henri Matisse, taught at the Academy of Art in Oslo. Exhibitions of Per Krohg's work attracted wide notice in Paris, Berlin, Copenhagen, and other world capitals. His paintings are on display at the Phillips Gallery in Washington, D.C., and at the United Nations Headquarters Building in New York City.