

Origins & Voyages to America

Verrazzano was born into a rich family of Val di Greve, south of Florence, the son of Pierandrea da Verrazzano and Fiammetta Capelli. Greve, at that time, was in the midst of a historical milieu, characterized by a remarkable Renaissance era of scholarly learning. Although he left a detailed account of his voyages to North America, little is known about his life. After 1506-1513 he moved to Normandy, in Dieppe, where he began his career as a navigator. He made numerous voyages to the eastern Mediterranean Sea, and in 1523 he was invited by King Francis I of France to explore the area between Florida and Terranova, in order to find an all-water route through the newly found Americas to the Pacific Ocean. He neared the area of Cape Fear on about March 1, 1524 and, after a short stay, he explored the coast further northward, reaching the Pamlico Sound lagoon. In a letter to Francis I, he wrote that he was convinced the latter was the beginning of the Pacific Ocean, from which an access could be gained to China. This report caused one of many long-lasting errors in the depiction of North America in contemporary maps. The continent would not be fully mapped until almost the 20th century.

Verrazzano also entered in contact with Native Americans living on the coast, showing his extraordinary humanistic culture. His reports about the natives were based mainly on curiosity and respect of their customs in a way that can be considered much more modern compared to the aggressive approach of most of the "Conquistadores" of his time. Subsequently, he passed by the Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware River, without registering them; in New York Bay he observed what he deemed to be a large lake, which was in fact the Hudson River. He then passed by Long Island and entered the Narragansett Bay, where he received a delegation of Wampanoag; here Verrazzano noted a "Norman Villa" marking it on his map. He stayed there for two weeks, and then moved northward, following the coast up to modern Maine, southeastern Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, after which he returned to France.

Later Verrazzano made two other voyages to North America.

Death

The cause of Verrazzano's death is not known for certain. The most popular story places his death in 1528, while exploring Florida, the Bahamas, and the Lesser Antilles. Verrazzano anchored away from shore and rowed in a little boat to greet the natives. But he found that they were not friendly natives who wanted to trade. Some say that he died in the Lesser Antilles or in the Caribbean, killed by cannibals who ate him, witnessed by his brother who was in the main boat anchored away from shore and could do nothing. Another source says that he was captured by the Spanish and hanged as a French corsair. Whatever the case, Giovanni da Verrazzano died at the age of 43.



Verrazzano's statue in his native town

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Giovanni da Verrazzano

Born in 1485

Died in 1528



Giovanni da Verrazzano

(often spelled Verrazano, according to ancient Italian) was an Italian explorer of North America, in the service of the French crown. He is renowned as the first European to explore the Atlantic coast of North America between South Carolina and Newfoundland, including New York Harbor and Narragansett Bay, in 1524.

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Dedication Dignitaries



Attorney Richard DiLiberto, Chairman of the Delaware Commission on Italian Heritage and Culture

History of the Monument

The “Centro Studi Storici Verrazzano”, located in Castello di Verrazzano in Greve in Chianti, began new studies on documents that had never before been totally analyzed. This research, together with a recently discovered genealogical tree, helped dispel doubts on several uncertain details of Giovanni da Verrazzano’s life and origin. It is assumed that Verrazzano was born in 1485, at his family's castle. He died in 1528 in the Lesser Antilles. Giovanni was a Florentine explorer sailing under the French flag.

These studies have been presented directly by those responsible for the Study Centre to a Delaware State Historian, who traveled to Castello di Verrazzano, 30 miles south of Florence, Italy, to view the documents and confirm their authenticity.

The monument to commemorate Giovanni da Verrazzano was sponsored by the Delaware Commission on Italian Heritage and Culture. Of special interest, the owner of the Verrazzano family castle donated three stones taken from the most ancient part of the castle. These stones now serve as part of the foundation of the monument.



In the picture is Luigi Cappellini, current owner of the Castle, proudly displaying the monument stones in July 2008 from the Castle grounds.

Dedication of the Monument

Dedication of the monument was held on October 18, 2008, at the monument site located at the Boardwalk and Olive Avenue in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.

The dedication ceremony was led by Attorney Richard DiLiberto, Chairman of the Delaware Commission on Italian Heritage and Culture, which sponsored the monument. A delegation from various regions of Italy, such as Tuscany, Liguria, was headed by Massimo Mattei, President of County Council, Florence, Italy, who addressed the audience in eloquent Italian, to the delight of all in attendance. Mr. Mattei’s speech was interpreted into English by Mary Teresa Morrison of Rehoboth Beach. The Color Corps of the Delaware Father Capodanno Knights of Columbus enhanced the celebration with a traditional salute as the monument was unveiled by State Historian and Archivist Russell McCabe and then blessed by Father Anthony Pileggi.

Prior to the dedication of the monument, the Delaware State Flag (shown below) was flown over Legislative Hall in Dover, the capital of Delaware, and then draped over the monument at the dedication ceremony. It was presented to Luigi Cappellini at the Verrazzano Castle in Greve in January 2009. The flag is now on display in the castle and draws a link to Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. Shown in the photo, from left to right, are David Mathe, Delaware International Trade and



Development Office, Luigi Cappellini, Richard DiLiberto and Dr. Alberto Giannetti, the Commission’s honorary representative in Italy.

Monument to honor the Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano



Massimo Mattei President, County Council Florence Italy And Sam Cooper, Mayor of Rehoboth Beach, DE