

JOAO RODRIGUES CABRILHO

Portuguese - American Society, FIII-614
El Estero Hotel - Sept. - 1938 - GPM

All too little is known of Cabrillo. We know that he was Portuguese, but we do not know when he was born, or where. He first appeared in New Spain in 1520, and he served with distinction during the Conquest of Mexico. By 1539, he had been rewarded by estates which brought in rentals totalling 12,000 ps. a year.

Before Cabrillo's time as an explorer, Ulloa in 1539 had discovered the mouth of the Colorado River, and Alarcon had ascended the river for some 200 miles. The viceroy of New Spain was exploration-minded, and to Cabrillo was given the task of building, at the little port of ^{La}stapa, a fleet of three galleons of 200 tons, three ships of 100 tons each, and several small craft. Cabrillo sent off two expeditions; one, under Alarcon, was to return to the Colorado, and the other, under Bolaños, was to explore the northern coast. Everyone, in those days, was looking for an "all-Spanish" route to China and to the Moluccas, or spice islands -- the East Indies as we call them today. And they thought that these islands were not too far away. Bolaños did not get far north of Cape San Lucas -- his journal does not even mention Cedros Island -- when he was forced back by storms. And so, in 1542, Cabrillo himself was directed by the viceroy to lead an expedition to the north.

On June 27 they left the port of Navidad in two vessels -- about which, unfortunately, we know practically nothing. One, the flagship, was the San Salvador, the other was a smaller vessel called the Victoria. They were commanded by Capts. Antonia Correa -- also Portuguese -- and San Roman. We do not know how big they were, but the Victoria was so small that she did not even have a deck. The San Salvador was possibly of Portuguese construction, as there is reference to her having been owned by Cabrillo himself, and she may indeed have been the vessel in which he came out to New Spain from Europe. His chief pilot, who later succeeded him, was Batrolome Ferrello.

