Commonwealth ave is a rare combination of the intense city life and the beauty of nature that can be seen in the suburbs. The area has the ability to walk a fine line and it uses this ability to highlight the unseen history and nature of Boston despite the cars crowding in from the Bowker Overpass.

The Commonwealth Ave Mall is a park that extends 32 acres down Commonwealth ave, obviously. Along the park are statues and memorials that pay tribute to great historical figures and tragic historical events, all with some connection to the Boston region. The Women's Memorial, the famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, and the founding father Alexander Hamilton, to name a few.

Yet, right at the entrance of the park is someone not as well known. The European explorer Lief Erikson is the very first statue to be seen. The statue stands tall at the beginning of the park. Welcoming everyone passing by or starting their journey down the history of Boston through the park.

It was a unique decision to put Erikson as the greeting to the park but when you learn the backstory it only makes sense. When you think of the founding of America or at least the settling in the new world the name that has been taught in schools has always been Christopher

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1. [https://www.boston.gov/parks/commonwealth-avenue-mall](https://www.boston.gov/parks/commonwealth-avenue-mall)
Columbus. Columbus is globally recognized as the discovery of America. There is a widely celebrated or protested Christopher Columbus Day and an entire ethnic group that gains pride from this. Yet there is an unseen part of history that parallels Columbus’ journey and an unseen legacy that comes with the Lief Erikson.

The viking from Greenland had come to the Americas about half a millennium earlier than Columbus. Yet, he left very little to no trace of his settlement while Columbus was credited brought slavery, disease and hardship to the native people. Seems kind of ironic that the European who caused the most damage got to be credited as the finder of the new world.

When Italians immigrated to America, they were discriminated against and so they found out about this history of Columbus and ran with it. They needed to show Americans that it was an Italian Man who founded your country so treat us with respect.

Like I said earlier people have protested against Columbus because apparently some people found it weird when others praise a cruel imperialist. The move to change the name of Columbus Day to Indigeious People’s Day began and the Anti- Columbus movement led us all back to the man, the myth, the legend, Lief Erikson.

Erikson is slowly coming back into modern light now. With pop culture stopping to ask itself; “How was America truly discovered and can the answer not be Christopher Columbus, like he was a pretty bad guy”. Historians and community leaders have done their research and

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3[https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/10/14/232120128/how-columbus-sailed-into-u-s-history-thanks-to-italians](https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/10/14/232120128/how-columbus-sailed-into-u-s-history-thanks-to-italians)
they even gave Erikson a day. “October 9 is Leif Erikson Day, which has been observed annually in the U.S. by presidential proclamation since the 1960s.” Oct. 9th right before Indigeus People’s Day on Oct. 11th, just to spite Columbus.

Though this is a modern movement toward giving Erikson recognition, this statue on Commonwealth mall came much earlier. While learning of Erikson’s story in 1887, there was a myth that the viking had settled in Cambridge. A rich businessman named Eben Norton Horsford set out to prove this truth had used his own money to commission for the statue to be built on Commonwealth Ave Mall. Horsford had the statue “portrayed Erikson as a young modern explorer instead of a rugged warrior”.

There are many details on the statue itself that depict this goal of modernizing Erikson for 1887 explorers and displaying the importance of Erikson’s legacy. The artist made the pedestal that Erikson stands on resemble that of a viking ship that he would have sailed during the time and is depicted sailing with in other works. There is a flower bed surrounding the pedestal that serves to symbolize the sea that the ship would’ve been sailing through to show the scene as a whole of Erikson looking out to the distance. The statue depicts the Greenland viking in a stance that is stereotypical of an explorer. His hand is over his eyes as if looking toward new horizons. It conveys his achievements in exploration. “The sculptor described the posture as a "man of the old world shading his vision against the glare of the new".

Another important aspect of the statue is the stairs that allow the viewers to interact with the monument. The words that actually say who the statue depicts are actually unreadable if the

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viewer does not use these stairs to get a closer look. This was such a good idea on the sculptor's side of things because Erikson is so distant from the times we live in today that in order to get people to care about him or the statue they need to make it an interactive work of art.

Erikson is someone that deserves the acknowledgement of discovery because too long he has been erased from history. Yet, when we need to make sure we remember the fight between Columbus and Erikson is completely futile at the end of the day because none of them were really discovering land. They both were simply going into someone else's land with much more power and the ability to say it's a discovery. Fighting for the title of first European to do something is a very small achievement but still my money is on Erikson.
Biography


Photo Cred:


