



# When it comes to the mysterious founder of the colony of Quebec, there are so many questions, and so few concrete answers.

Is it Samuel Champlain, or Samuel de Champlain? The short "de" can make a considerable difference. To the French, the word "de" generally denotes a noble origin. Was Champlain of noble birth?

His first book, written in 1603, was titled Des Sauvages, ou, Voyages de Samuel Champlain de Brouage. Ten years later, he published Voyages du sieur de Champlain Xaintongeois. This time, Champlain's nom de plume carried the particle "de." The fact that he added Xaintongeois is not at issue; after all, Brouage, which he names as his hometown, is in the French province of Saintonge.

In actual fact, we don't know anything about Champlain's birth.

Based on skilful deductions, experts place his year of birth between 1567 and 1580. Even though

they have no documentary proof, they agree that he came from Brouage. Champlain's

marriage contract describes him as "a noble man, son of the noble Antoine." The terms used have left historians perplexed. Is Champlain a nobleman or a commoner? That single indication on his marriage contract does not answer the question.

Even his religion is uncertain. His marriage took place in the Saint-Germainl'Auxerrois Catholic church. But was he born a Catholic? It's very difficult to answer either of these questions unequivocally.

In fact, most of what is known about Champlain comes primarily from the four works that he published — the accounts of

False portrait his adventures in North America, presented in chronoof Samuel de logical order. He obviously felt no need to write about his Champlain, sojourns in France and even less to provide details of his based on an personal life.

So it's almost by accident that he mentioned, in one of of Michael his writings, that he was married.

In 1632, he wrote: "In 1620, my family and I returned to d'Emery New France; we arrived there in May. ... Everyone thanked by Balthazar God for our safe arrival, in particular myself; my family had Moncornet, had to endure many discomforts during the rough pasdated 1654. sage." On July 8, he adds, "a small boat" came to meet them at Tadoussac. Champlain notes: "Sieur Boullé, my brotherin-law, was in the boat and he was very surprised to see his sister and her determination to cross such rough seas; he was very pleased as were her [my wife] and I."

Although Champlain published over one thousand pages in four books, he never again mentions his wife. Eustache Boullé (sometimes spelled Boulé, Boullet, or Boullay), to whom he referred as his brother-in-law, was Champlain's right-hand man. Champlain brought "his family" back to France in 1624.

To date, no correspondence between Champlain and his wife has been found. The couple married in December 1610. Although the beginning of their union was stormy, they gradually settled into married life. Hélène Boullé, a young bride aged twelve, was a Calvinist, but she converted to Catholicism shortly after her marriage and even went as far as convincing her brother to convert. He joined the Order of the Minimes Brothers in the 1630s, while she eventually became an Ursuline nun after the death of her husband.

#### Financially independent

There remains one big question about the union: Did Champlain marry for convenience? Was it for the dowry?





engraved portrait Particelli

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Or was it for the network of influence the marriage provided, especially following the death of King Henry IV? The question we really should be asking is: What was the state of Champlain's finances?

Historian Joe C.W. Armstrong, with the help of the archivist Victorin Chabot, decided to study a document that had been overlooked by researchers. It was a statement made under oath by one Guillermo Elena, who was known to historians as a capitaine provençal (a captain from Provence).

On his deathbed, he chose to leave his property to Champlain, who had followed him to Cadiz, in southwestern Spain, after the Treaty of Vervins in 1598 ended France's conflict with Spain. They were apart during

Champlain's long voyage to the Above: Foundation Spanish colonies in America of Quebec City by (1599-1601). Champlain re- Samuel de Chamturned just in time to take care plain 1608, a work of the man he considered his in stained glass at uncle. Overnight, Champlain the National became a rich man.

Although financially inde- parliament of pendent, Champlain was in no Quebec. Made by position to fund a colonization Gauthier et frères project single-handedly. That in 1920. was not a project to be taken on

by an individual; it had to be a state affair.

When Aymar de Chaste, the new holder of the trade King of France and monopoly for the St. Lawrence, suggested that Champlain Navarre, circa 1595, accompany François Dupont-Gravé to Canada, the former French school agreed, subject to "the orders of his majesty, to whom I am (16th century).

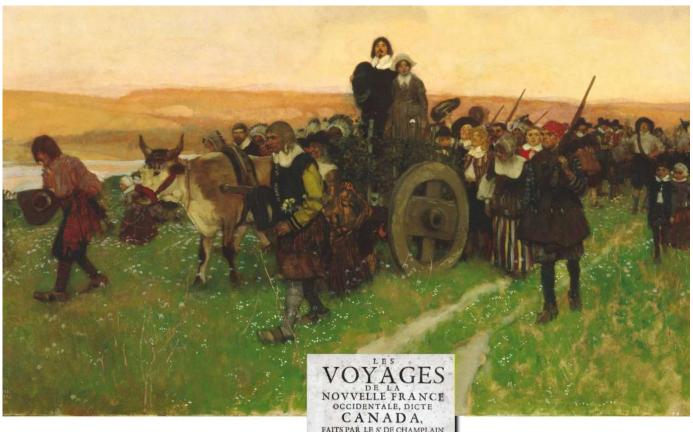
Assembly in the

Left: Henry IV,

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Above: Arrival of Madame Quebec 1620, painting by Frank Craig, 1909.

Right: Champlain's 1632 book, Les Voyages de la Nouvelle France occidentale, dicte Canada.

obligated both for my birth and the pension that I am honoured to receive." Thus, Champlain at Dupont-Gravé received an official letter from the orders secretary requesting that he take Champlain on board and help him "as much as possible for the undertaking."

> Champlain's main responsibility was to "to submit a faithful report" to the king.

From 1603, Champlain travelled to the St. Lawrence region several times with Dupont-Gravé and carried out his work as an explorer and geographer.

He studied his surroundings, learned from the natives, calculated his position and made notes. Whether he was on board a canoe, inside a tent, or in a hut, he made notes of his observations, added comments and put his thoughts in order. That was the way he worked.

Year after year, he knew he had to explain his work and convince those who were funding his voyages. His accounts were articles of propaganda. He addressed business people and merchants; the first of his books was dedicated to Admiral Charles de Montmorency, the second to King Henry IV, and others to the Regent Marie de Medicis, the Prince of Condé, and the new king, Louis XIII. Not only

did he navigate the Atlantic, he also waded through the intrigues of the court, political battles, and religious quarrels. He had access to influential people; all he had to do was convince them to support his endeavours.

#### Prolific author and visionary

Champlain was not satisfied with simply producing reports or papers. He wrote long accounts of his travels in 1603, 1613, 1619, and 1632. He was so prolific a writer that historians are overwhelmed by his work. Was he aware of the role he was playing? Was he protecting his image and upholding his dreams at the same time?

Champlain has often been por-

trayed as a devout and enigmatic man who was unaffected by glory and disinterested in worldly goods. Indeed, he bequeathed most of his property to the Virgin Mary and the church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Recouvrance in Quebec City. Also, towards the end of his life, he had the lives of the saints read to him during his evening meal.

The Jesuits also had a profound impact on him. The Jesuits influenced Champlain while he was writing the record of his voyages in 1632. The young native girls dancing nude in Tadoussac in 1603's Des Sauvages had disappeared, and so had the "shameless" Huron from Otouacha who "brazenly" offered herself to him.

Champlain immediately understood the importance of the native people; he yearned to know them and strove to make them known. He established a personal relationship with several chiefs in the region, including Anadabijou, Messamouet, Miristou, Nibachis, Tessouat, Batiscan, and Ochateguin. He laid the groundwork for alliances that would enable the French to develop the fur trade, as well as travel across, explore and map the continent.

From the moment he stepped on North American soil, Champlain was focused on one goal - finding a way to cross the continent that obstructed the route to China. Right from his first voyage (c.1599) to the Caribbean and Central America, he foresaw the development of a considerable fifteen-hundred-league shortcut via the Isthmus of Panama. His ideas became clearer over the years. In the two letters he wrote in 1618 - one for the Chamber of Commerce and the second for the king — he made an inventory of the wealth available in New France: fishing, pelts, timber, mines, agriculture, and livestock, not to mention the profits to be obtained from the "short route to China." Naturally, he did not omit the establishment of the Christian faith "among countless numbers of souls" spread over an immense territory "watered by the fairest rivers in the world."

In the letter to the king, he emphasized the revenues that would be generated from the trade in "merchandise from China and the Indies" and the customs duties that would be collected.

#### **Explorer and cartographer**

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. If so, then Champlain's sketches tell us volumes about his love for drawing.

There was no doubt he had studied the basics of cartography; right from his very first essays, he revealed a surprisingly extensive knowledge of the various calculations required to create maps, and astounded experts with the precision of his calculations. Conrad E. Heidenreich demonstrates this eloquently in Cartographica (Monograph nº 17/1976). Although he started off using his own observations, Champlain was also smart enough to enlist the help of native people as guides throughout his journeys in North America.

In creating his maps, Champlain also relied on information gathered from European explorers; for instance, he used information on Virginia prepared by John Smith. Although very little is known about the sources he used for Newfoundland and Labrador, the same cannot be said about his representation of the Hudson strait and bay. Even today, experts wonder — how could his 1613 map have been so accurate? After all, even though he would have loved to have visited them, and also held on to the hope of finding a passage to China, he never actually explored those regions. He believed that if it was possible to circumvent the Americas via the south, there was no reason why a similar route couldn't be found via the north.

During his first voyage (1603), he explored a stretch along the St. Lawrence River measuring more than twenty-five hundred kilometres and gathered a significant

amount of information from the native people. He also learned that the Saguenay, through a series of lakes and rivers, led to a large bay (Hudson Bay). Between 1604 and 1607, he explored approximately two thousand kilometres along the Atlantic coast up to Massachusetts.

In 1608, Champlain returned to the St. Lawrence. His mind made up, he established a permanent post at a place called "Quebecq" that he had visited in 1603 and that Guillaume Levasseur had clearly indicated on his 1601 map, most probably prompted by Dupont-Gravé. Note that the name Quebecq replaced Stadacona, which was the name of the original native village located there. Dupont-Gravé, who was very close to the natives, was told the word Quebecq meant "where the river narrows."

The French explorer Jacques Cartier first visited Stadacona in 1535. By the time Champlain arrived, the natives of this agricultural village seemed to have disappeared: "The country was then inhabited by more settled people than it is now," Champlain wrote. The disappearance of



the natives was, for a long time, thought be to due to wars
between rival aboriginal groups. Today, however, historians better understand the terrible toll European-borne diseases, such as smallpox, took on native communities in the region.

Champlain, fires his arquebus into a crowd of Iroquois as his Huron allies pelt

Champlain took for granted that the King of the time had "the fierce desire to send people to the place."

Champlain wanted to keep exploring to the west, but the native people were reluctant. They negotiated. Champlain first had to help the Hurons fight the Iroquois. In 1609 and 1610, he fought valiantly in the raids. Everything went well the first time.

Standing before a group of defiant Iroquois warriors, Champlain and his Huron allies attacked: "I held my arquebus against my cheek and aimed directly at one of the three chiefs. Suddenly, two fell to the ground and one of their

Champlain, fires his arquebus into a crowd of Iroquois as his Huron allies pelt their enemies with arrows, in this engraving attributed to the famed French explorer. The attack took place in 1609.

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# THEVOYAGES

Explorer, geographer, cartographer: Samuel de Champlain's

## 1613

# NEW FRANCE

After he's told of the discovery of a route to the fabled "North Sea" Champlain explores the Ottawa River. It's an arduous journey, through many rapids, to Rideau Falls. Finding no evidence of the route. Champlain abandons the journey.

TADOUSSAC

OTTAWA QUEBEC

## **1615**

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## 1608-1609

Champlain returns to the St. Lawrence and founds Quebec. The following year, he joins a war party of Montagnais, Algonquins and Hurons against the Iroquois. They enter the Rivière des Iroquois (Richelieu) and arrive at what's today known as Lake Champlain.

#### 1604-1607

Champlain helps Pierre Dugua de Mons found the colony of Port Royal (now Annapolis Royal, N.S.). Beginning in 1605, he spends three years surveying the eastern coastline from Nova Scotia to Cape Cod, Massachusetts.







Champlain and Huron warriors launch an attack on the Iroquois. Travelling up the Ottawa River as far as

Lake Huron, Champlain is wounded at Lake Simcoe.

Forced to retreat across the eastern portion of Lake

Ontario, Champlain spends the winter convalescing

with the Huron before returning to Quebec.





# THE AGE OF DISCOVERY

#### St. Brendan

Tales abound of St. Brendan, an Irish monk who lived in the sixth century, travelling across the Atlantic Ocean. Some speculate that the monk actually made it to Newfoundland.

### Vikings

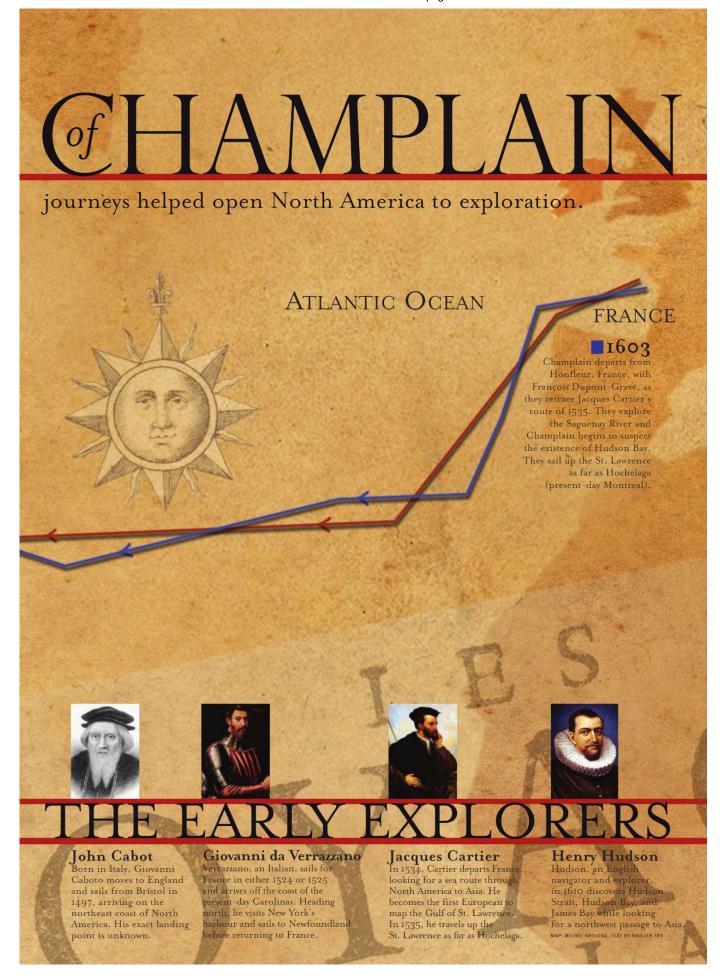
Greenlandic sagas suggest Bjarni Herjulfsson was the first European to spot North America, in the tenth century. Leff Ericsson later tries to form a colony at Vinland — possibly present—day Newfoundland.

#### European fishermen

Records suggest that from 1480 onwards, European fishermen fished off the coast of North America and may have established facilities for processing fish at Newfoundland.

#### Christopher Columbus

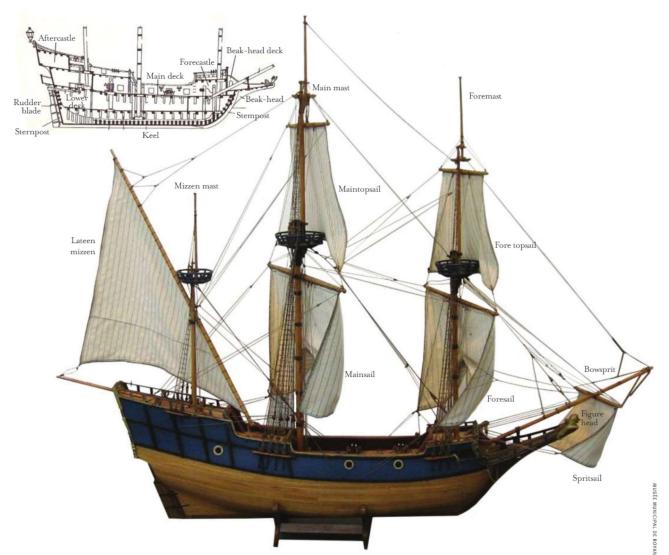
In 1492, sailing for the Spanish crown, Columbus arrives in what is now the Bahamas and names it San Salvador. He believes that he has arrived in India.



# The Don de Dieu

The *Don de Dieu*, meaning "Gift of God" was a 135-tonne ship commanded by Samuel de Champlain. In 1608 the wooden vessel sailed up the St. Lawrence as far as Tadoussac, bringing thirty colonists. From there they travelled in smaller boats and on July 3, 1608, Champlain founded what was to become the city of

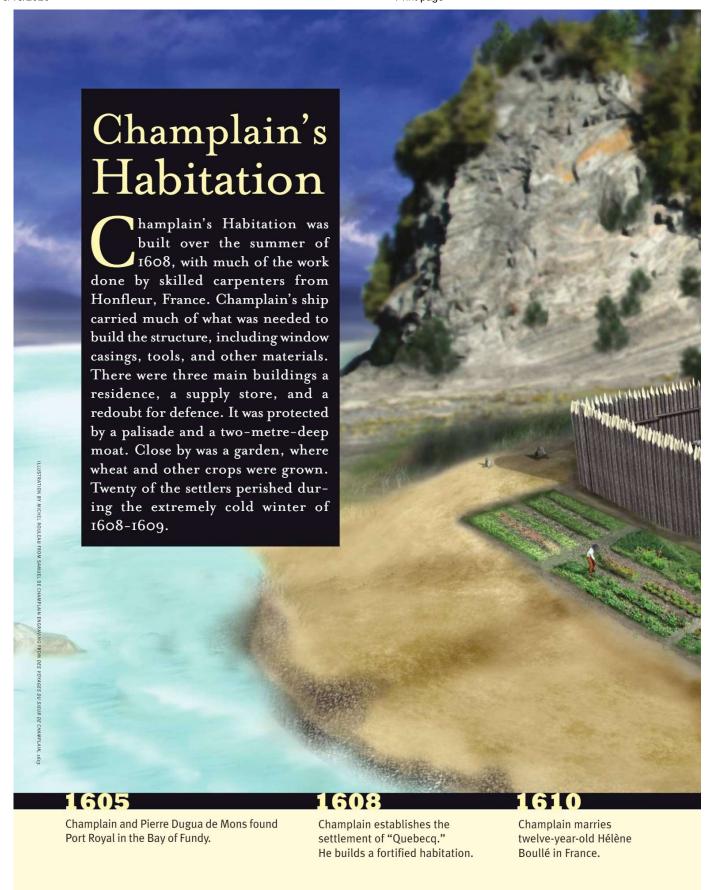
Quebec. The Don de Dieu was loaded with provisions for a year and the material needed to build a permanent settlement, "l'Abitation." Aboard the ship were saws to cut trees and planks, shovels to dig ditches and cellars, wheat and rye to plant crops, plus vines, fruit trees, and vegetable seeds.



# THE LIFE OF CHAMPLAIN 1567 1599 16

The earliest estimated date of Samuel de Champlain's birth. It's believed he was born sometime between 1567 and 1580.

Champlain travels to the Caribbean and South America. Champlain makes his first trip to North America and maps the St. Lawrence River. His book *Des Sauvages* is based on this trip.





Champlain creates a map that shows presentday Hudson Bay. He also charts part of the Ottawa River and publishes an account of his travels from 1604 onward.

Champlain returns to France. He will make numerous trips between New France and France during his life.

For the first time, Champlain's wife, now 22, accompanies him to New France. She stays in the settlement for four years.

Assassins' plot almost altered history



n June 3, 1608, Basque fishermen in Tadoussac hatched a plot to murder Samuel de Champlain. They hoped to prevent, or at least delay, his plan to set up a rival trading post upriver on the St. Lawrence. The Basques recruited some of Champlain's French crew to try to assassinate him.

The Frenchmen sailed upriver, arriving at what would one day be Quebec City on July 3, 1608. Soon afterwards, one of the conspirators had second thoughts and revealed

the plan to Captain Testu, who then informed Champlain.

Champlain pardoned the man who warned him and had four conspirators arrested. Jean Duval, the main "traitor," was tried, convicted, and then hanged. Afterwards, his head was stuck on the end of a spike. The other three men were sent to France for trial.

But the question remains: What would have happened had the founder of Quebec City been assassinated?

- Jacques Lacoursière



# Faking Champlain

No one really knows what Champlain looked like, but artists who never saw him and lived long after his time have made many portraits of him. During Champlain's era, only people in the very highest of royal, clerical, or military circles had their portraits painted.



Even Quebec City's famous statue of Champlain, erected in 1898, isn't really him — it's based on a 1664 portrait of Particelli d'Emery (France's controller of finance), which was deliberately fabricated in 1854 and turned into a "por-

trait" of the father of New France. Indeed, the closest we've come to seeing the true face of Champlain is an image that he himself made — an engraving of a 1609 battle between the Iroquois and Champlain and his Algonquin allies, which shows him shooting his arquebus at his enemies.



# The Astrolabe

he mariner's astrolabe was one of the most common navigational instruments of the seventeenth century. The astrolabe was typically a heavy cast-brass wheel, with its circumference marked out in degrees. It had a sighting pointer, or alidade, on a central pivot.

Some believe an astrolabe found in 1867 on a creek bank in Cobden, Ontario once belonged to Samuel de Champlain. Others, however, theorize the device actually belonged to Jesuit missionaries

Now referred to as the "Cobden astrolabe," it's on display at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. - Beverley Tallon

Read "The Mystery of Champlain's Astrolabe" in The Beaver [December 2004/January 2005].

#### 1629

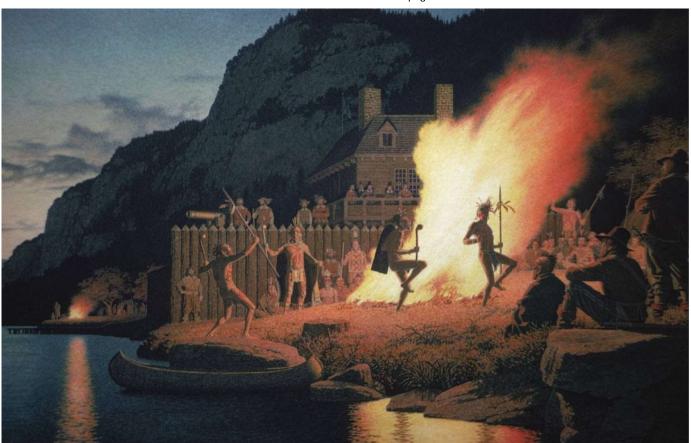
#### 1632

## 1633-35

Champlain temporarily loses Quebec to the Kirke brothers after a lengthy siege.

Champlain publishes Les Voyages de la Nouvelle France Occidentale, dicte Canada, which contains his most famous map of New France.

Champlain returns to Quebec in 1633 and dies two years later, on Christmas Day.



Huron, Montagnais, and Algonquin warriors perform a war dance in 1609 outside Champlain's Quebec habitation, under the looming shadow of Cap Diamant, in this 1978 illustration. Champlain, by Jean-Léon Huens. companions was hurt; the latter died shortly thereafter from his wounds." Surprise turned to panic when another Frenchman who was ambushed nearby opened fire.

The next year (1610), during a brief visit to New France, Champlain once again gave in and marched against the Iroquois. Slightly wounded, he continued with his explorations and returned to France in August with a young Huron named Savignon. The French often brought natives back to France in order to train them as interpreters. Upon his return to France, Champlain learned of the assassination of King Henry IV.

Two years later, he met with bad luck on the way to Paris. Following an accident, he was forced to convalesce for a few weeks. He took advantage of the time to write a progress report; he wrote his memoirs and prepared a magnificent map (1612) with the help of engraver David Pelletier.

He had just finished his masterpiece when he was shown a map drawn by Hessel Gerritsz of the route taken by Henry Hudson north of the continent. This spurred Champlain into action. Without losing a moment, he returned to his drawing board, took elements from his previous map, and, without hesitating, added the information in Gerritsz's *Tabula Nautica*. It was almost an exact copy. The periphery of the continent and the indentations were the same; the islands of the bay were in the same place and had the same rectangular shape. In addition, Champlain wrote "*mare magnum*" where Gerritsz had written "*Mare magnum ab M Hudsono pri-*

*mum inventum.*" At the bottom of the bay, Champlain noted "the bay wher (sic) hudson did winter," wrongly copying "bay where Hudson did winter."

It was at this point that luck seemed to shine on Champlain and his quest to find a quick route to China.

Champlain learned of the arrival in Paris of young Nicolas de Vignau, a French explorer whom Champlain had left with the Algonquins to learn their customs. Amazingly, Vignau was claiming he had reached the northern sea and had even noticed a shipwrecked English vessel.

Champlain was shaken. The account was plausible and he was already excited about Hudson's recent exploit. While Champlain's publisher prepared to publish his next book, the French explorer scrambled back to New France. He insisted that Vignau lead him towards the northern sea — immediately.

Vignau agreed, but Champlain's Algonquin allies refused to help them. They instead accused the young Frenchman of lying.

"You went there in your sleep," said Chief Tessouat of Vignau's supposed journey to the fabled northern sea. "You were dreaming." The native chief was so convincing that Champlain changed his mind and accused Vignau of being "the most brazen liar to be heard in a long time." Champlain was furious. He returned in France in 1613, after an eighteen-day crossing. Once there, he returned to work — completing his draft, adding an approximation of the Outaouais River and writing an account of a "fourth voyage" that was added to his new book (1613).

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#### Ethnographer and administrator

In May 1615, he returned to New France accompanied by Récollect missionaries. Their destination: Huron country. A new military campaign was failing. Champlain's tactical efforts did not suffice and neither did his courage. He sustained quite serious wounds to the knee and leg. Especially embarrassing, he had to be transported "bound and gagged" and "carried for a few days on the back" of a native person. He became impatient and wanted to escape from the prison, "or better said, from that hell."

At the time, the season was changing and Champlain was forced to follow the Huron on their fall hunt. Turning this bad luck into a positive, he switched from explorer to ethnographer. He began recording the "manners, customs and modes of life" of the Huron. In the spring (May 1616), he encountered his good friend Dupont-Gravé at Sault Saint-Louis. They agreed on the importance of fortifying Quebec. Champlain worked on the project over the subsequent weeks. Without realizing it, he had switched roles. He had become an administrator.

Champlain shuttled back and forth between France and New France many times during his life. Between 1617 and 1629, he made four more return trips, the last as a prisoner of the Kirke brothers, privateers working for England. Champlain resisted the Kirkes' attack on Quebec, but after a siege was forced to surrender his beloved colony.

Where had he learned everything he knew? For now, we can only make assumptions.

Meanwhile, in Quebec, the unfortunate Pierre Dugua de Mons is being brought out of the closet. The dedication of his devotees is such that they have declared him founder, or at least co-founder, of Quebec. Notwithstanding the fact that he never actually visited Quebec, they argue that as the holder of the monopoly on the fur trade on the St. Lawrence in 1608, he indeed funded the founding of the colony.

However, it is François Dupont-Gravé who springs immediately to mind if there is ever any question of redressing any omissions made during that period. For thirty years, he worked with Champlain and took him on an exploration of the St. Lawrence and Quebec. It was under the influence of Dupont-Gravé that Champlain convinced Dugua de Mons to relinquish Acadia and focus on re-establishing his monopoly on the St. Lawrence. It was also thanks to Dupont-Gravé that Champlain chose Quebec as the location for the permanent settlement.

One thing is clear — even if he's too strong a personality for some tastes, it is Samuel de Champlain who is responsible for the founding of Quebec in 1608 and for it surviving the 1629 occupation.

Champlain is also responsible for the alliances between the French and the native Indians, without which there would have been no French-speaking Amer-

# He was the most important person in the history of New France, yet Samuel de Champlain was also the most mysterious.

As soon as he arrived in England, he went to the French ambassador, Monsieur Châteauneuf, and informed him that he had surrendered Quebec (July 19, 1629), two months after the signing of a peace treaty between England and France (April 24, 1629). He was proved right — due to the treaty, the English were obliged to return the conquered territory.

In 1632, Champlain began writing a new, revised version of his travels. He changed some of his previous versions, completed some and enriched others. Titled *Les Voyages de la Nouvelle France Occidentale, dite Canada*, the 1632 book was entrusted with his most famous map—the so-called *Carte de la Nouvelle France, augmentée depuis le derniere, par le Sr de Champlain, 1632.* The following year, he returned to Quebec, this time accompanied by Jesuit missionaries. His health, however, was failing. Father Charles Lalemant, a Jesuit missionary, attended to Champlain in his final days. He died at Quebec on December 25, 1635.

#### **Father of New France**

Although there is no doubt he was the most important person in the history of New France, Samuel de Champlain was also the most secretive, mysterious, and enigmatic. In fact, very little is known about his private life. ica. In this regard, the 1603 meeting in Tadoussac between Chief Anadabijou and Dupont-Gravé and Champlain is as important as the very founding of Quebec in 1608. It marked the fact that the natives and the French were living side by side, it paved the way for cultural exchange and it opened the door for the French to penetrate the North American continent up to the Gulf of Mexico in the south and the Rockies in the west.

Denis Vaugeois is a Quebec historian, editor and publisher who has produced numerous works, including *The Last French and Indian War* (McGill-Queen's, 2002); *Champlain: The Birth of French America* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), *America* (Vehicule Press, 2003) and *America's Gift*, Septentrion, 2007, a collaboration with Kathe Roth (in press).

#### **Et Cetera**

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Engraving of Pierre Dugua de Mons.

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