

Champlain's Legacy

When concerning ourselves with a person's legacy, we are trying to understand what it is that he or she has left behind. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary legacy is something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past. Samuel de Champlain's legacy, although misunderstood and ignored in his native France for a long time, had a great effect on the way in which we live today. Champlain's work in strengthening the fur trade to establish a colony, his alliances with Indians, and his published works are all a part of his legacy. One can better understand and see the importance of his legacy, given the hundreds of years that have passed since Champlain's death.

The fur trade of the 16th century was not nearly as profitable and continuous as the fur trade established during Champlain's service to France in the early 17th century. Champlain vehemently supported a government monopoly over the fur trade as a means to control and harness its profits for the development of a French colony. To accommodate this, Champlain petitioned the French Crown to restore the monopoly over the fur trade for the year of 1608. The restoration of the monopoly allowed for the settlement of Quebec on July 3, 1608. Though the monopoly only lasted a year, its dissolution did not discourage Champlain. The free trade of furs placed the cost of maintaining a colony solely on Champlain and the few who were interested in colonizing New France.

By 1612, the costs of maintaining a settlement at Quebec became unbearable. In response, Champlain organized a common company of traders that had exclusive rights to trade along the St. Lawrence. In return they paid for the maintenance and further

establishment of settlements in New France. Although significant interest in colonizing New France did not occur until after Champlain's death, Champlain formed the foundation of colonization by strengthening the fur trade and harnessing its profits. Thanks to his legacy, the success of Quebec, the future settlement of Montreal in 1642 and further French colonization were made possible.

In his attempts to protect the fur trade and French colonization from Indian attack, Champlain moved the French away from neutrality and towards alliance. In the summer of 1609, Champlain and his men joined a Huron and Algonquin war party in their attack on the Iroquois along present day Lake Champlain. Champlain's choice to side with the Huron and Algonquin tribes was motivated by their location and their involvement in the fur trade. The defeat of the Iroquois, in 1609, and further defeats would shape the deep-seated hostility between the Iroquois and French in the years to come. Furthermore, Champlain's decision to attack the Iroquois created an enemy and barrier to French exploration and expansion in the south.

An important part of Champlain's legacy is the documentation of his voyages. Champlain published four works on his voyages with the intent of generating support for the colonization of New France as well as the recruitment of settlers. *Des Sauvages* (1603), was Champlain's printed report of his first voyage to Canada. Champlain focuses on his adventures from 1604 to 1613 in his second publication, *Les Voyages* (1613). In this book Champlain included useful information besides the thrilling adventure stories. The third publication, *Voyages et Descouvertes* (1619), covers the years of 1615 to 1618. Out of the four publications this was Champlain's greatest appeal to settlers. For the settlement at Quebec and others to survive, Champlain needed to attract people. His

fourth and final publication, *Les Voyages de la Nouvelle France* (1632), was the largest of the four and was meant to be the sum of his life's work. Champlain left nothing unsaid as he described New France, compiled advice for the "good navigator", and stated his final thoughts. Although these works are the most tangible and directly revealing aspects of Champlain's legacy, little attention was given to them in France during his life or around the time after his death.

Champlain's legacy affected the course of history far after his death. The colonization of New France directly coincided with the increase in wealth and power of France years after Champlain's death. The security established for the fur trade and settlement, as a result of the pre-emptive attacks against the Iroquois and the resulting hostility between the French and Iroquois, lasted long after Champlain. Although Champlain's establishment of New France was eventually lost to the British, his legacy still rests in the city of Quebec. Furthermore Champlain's legacy will always be preserved in his written accounts.

- David Sabatino, Marist '07

Bibliographic Note

In preparation for my research on Samuel de Champlain I searched the Marist Library catalog in hopes of finding some useful sources. Unfortunately my search rendered me with only one source that seemed hardly worth my time to takeout of the library. When taking on a research project such as this one on Champlain, it is most practical to find as many quality sources as possible. One would hope that the sources present the same factual accounts or if not, at the very least varying scholarly opinions on why things are inaccurate, unanswerable or peculiar about an aspect of what one is researching. I found that in the case of Samuel de Champlain an abundance of quality sources were not available, and those that were available were sub-par to what research and writing I was being asked to produce.

PRINTED PRIMARY SOURCES

The only primary source I was able to find was Samuel de Champlain's *Voyages of Samuel de Champlain: 1604-1618* (New York, 1907). Champlain's account of his voyages between the years of 1604 and 1618 are contained in this source. The source was most useful in describing Champlain's interactions with Native Americans, his personal goals he wished to achieve through exploration, and the course of events in France involving the New World. The source is extensive and contains Champlain's narrative of one voyage he made to the Caribbean and eight out of the eleven voyages he made to Canada and New England. The historical value of the book is questionable in certain areas because one must take into account the audience the book was written for. Although Champlain was predominantly concerned with finding a Northwest Passage, he was also concerned with exporting the image of Canada to the French back home. Like

any source the bias of the author must be measured. Champlain had more reason to highlight the best qualities of the New World than to take an un-biased approach. The interest of the King and French people back home determined the amount of money invested in his exploration as well as the establishment of New France. Because of this bias, scholars approach some of Champlain's unexplainable findings and reports as exaggeration, but not so much exaggeration that it discredits Champlain's account entirely. Three other publications of Champlain's exist but I was unable to acquire a copy of any of the three.

SECONDARY SOURCES

My first attempts to locate useful secondary sources led me to children's publications. Apparently Champlain is a popular figure for kids in elementary school and as a result there is an abundance of children's publications about him. Working my way through all the juvenile search hits I came across three secondary sources that I had access to. The first and most useful secondary source I found was *Champlain: The Life of Fortitude* (New York, 1979) by Morris Bishop. Bishop takes most of his information from Champlain's publications and places his and other scholars' interpretations over it. The most useful feature of the book is the way the chapters are divided and named by Champlain's voyages. At the top of each page you can find the year in which the chapter is focused on and at the end of the book Bishop's includes Appendixes explaining some of the ongoing debates concerning Champlain. This source was convenient to use, easy to understand and follow, and provided factual information with intellectual information. The second source I found was *Champlain: The Birth of French America* (Montreal, 2004) by Raymonde Litalien. The information contained in this source was not much

different from Bishop's book but more difficult to use. Litalien's book was not divided by year and voyage like Bishop's book and when reading Litalien I felt like I was reading a novel and not history. For the most part it was too difficult to stay focused and locate information quickly when using Litalien's book. My third source *Champlain* (Toronto, 1963) by N.E. Dionne was the most comprehensive source. Unlike Bishop and Litalien, Dionne did not chronologically go through Champlain's life as an explorer. Instead Dionne chose specific topics and themes, such as Champlain's relations with Native Americans or Champlain's settlement of Quebec, to focus on. This source was most useful when I wanted additional information on a specific topic or theme in Champlain's life. Dionne was quite extensive and focused in his research and writing and as a result his book proved to be a great source for my research and writing. My fourth and final source was *Samuel de Champlain: Father of New France* (Boston, 1972) but since I had to return this book long ago I cannot write about it with the accuracy I would like to.

Although the sources I used provided sufficient information for me to address the five topics I wrote on, I would have liked to have more sources to tackle each topic with. My research on Champlain has showed me that as an historian not everything I research and write about will have an endless pool of sources to choose from.