

## Champlain's Voyages

When we think of Columbus first sighting land, after his trans-Atlantic voyage, in 1492 or Henry Hudson sailing up the Hudson River in 1609, we picture these men at the helm of their ships making great discoveries in command. We associate the *Pinta*, the *Nina*, and the *Santa Maria* with Columbus and the *Half Moon* with Hudson, as their vessels of discovery. Unlike these and many other explorers, Samuel de Champlain doesn't have an association with a specific ship. Although there is contradicting evidence on Champlain's command of the ships he sailed on, most historians believe he had few commanding powers on his trans-Atlantic voyages. Instead, his commanding role took shape on the smaller ships sent to explore the in-land waterways.

Champlain's maiden trans-Atlantic voyage was not for the French King he would spend most of his life working for, but instead under the flag of the Spanish. With the help of his uncle, who was serving in the Spanish navy, Champlain was given a spot on the *Saint Julien*. The ship was part of a routine Spanish voyage, in 1599, to the West Indies and Central America. Most likely Champlain had no commanding role but was serving as a cartographer on the voyage. The controversy about Champlain's first voyage is so varied that there are some historians who believe Champlain lied and did not even make the trip.

After his voyage on the Spanish ship ended, Champlain did not sail again until 1603. This time on a French ship, Champlain set sail out of Honfleur, France on the *Bonne Renommee* under captain Pontgrave. Champlain and Pontgrave shared most of their trans-Atlantic voyages together and over time became good friends. Champlain's third voyage in 1604 was also led by Pontgrave who was under the command of Pierre du

Gua, sieur de Monts. This voyage failed at setting up a permanent French settlement on Sainte Croix, but allowed Champlain to explore the New England coastline.

After planning out an interior settlement up the St. Lawrence River, Champlain commanded his own ship, the *Don de Dieu*, which set sail in 1608. Sticking to his plan, Champlain traveled up-river and established the settlement of Quebec. Champlain's fifth, sixth and seventh voyages were all led by Pontgrave. On these voyages Champlain settled Place Royale, near present day Montreal and made multiple smaller voyages in search of the Northwest Passage. It was on these voyages that Champlain took more command than he ever did on the larger, trans-Atlantic ships. In addition, Champlain led a small amount of men in a pinnace, a small and lighter boat, through river and lake systems.

The eighth voyage of Champlain was made on the *Saint-Etienne* with Pontgrave in command once again. During a visit to the Huron Indians in 1615, Champlain decided that in order to maintain and expand the French fur trade, the Iroquois Indians to the south had to be defeated. However, Champlain's forces were defeated and forced to retreat. He returned to France in hopes of encouraging more settlers to come to New France. A short ninth voyage was made to New France in June 1618 with Pontgrave in command. It was during these years that Champlain desperately tried to establish Quebec. Without him the settlement suffered.

After being appointed Governor of New France, Champlain made his tenth voyage across the Atlantic in 1620, this time with his wife Helene. Champlain found Quebec in dire need of repair and spent most of his time employing people to repair and further build the settlement. It was not until 1624 that he and his wife returned to France.

Shortly after his arrival he was given a higher position in New France which, in turn, gave him more power. Knowing that New France needed his attention he made his eleventh voyage in 1626 on the ship *Catherine*. Within two years of his arrival at Quebec, New France was under siege by the English. Low on supplies and guaranteed fair treatment, Champlain surrendered Quebec. It was not until 1633 that Champlain made his twelfth and final voyage to New France.

The contradicting evidence and opinions on Champlain and his voyages make it hard to connect the explorer to the command of a ship. Also, his multiple voyages made on different ships make it hard to connect Champlain to a specific ship. The nature of Champlain's exploration is another reason why we fail to connect him to a ship. Unlike the explorers that remained along the Atlantic, never venturing far from the main body of water, Champlain penetrated the continent. It wasn't possible for him to sail a large vessel from France and continue with it through smaller rivers and if needed across land. Champlain's interest in making maps and drawing detailed images of the people, animals and vegetation he saw, may have also deterred him from taking the command of ships more often than he did.

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### **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.