

The Father of New France

The French attempts to settle Canada before the arrival of Samuel de Champlain were all but successful. Champlain demonstrated the dedication, patience and belief in establishing a colony for France like no other Frenchman sent before him. Most often driven by greed, these men placed settlement second to their desire to enrich themselves through the fur trade. Samuel de Champlain is appropriately called the “Father of New France”, because he nurtured the colonization of Canada through its failures, setbacks and successes.

The French plans to colonize North America, in 1603, differed from the common practiced policies of colonization. Instead of direct government support and control over the establishment of settlements, King Henry IV favored a colonization based on the monopoly of the fur trade. The King granted Pierre du Gua, sieur de Monts the complete control of the fur trade for ten years but not without several requirements. One of the requirements was to establish French settlements between the fortieth and forty-sixth degrees latitude. The territory allotted for settlement was from present day Cape Breton to Philadelphia. De Monts organized two ships and recruited several men, including Champlain, and departed in 1604.

Originally planning to settle along the St. Lawrence River, de Monts went against Champlain’s recommendation and chose to find a spot along the Atlantic coast. After extensive exploration of the New Brunswick coastline, de Monts chose Sainte Croix Island as the location for his settlement. This selection proved disastrous when winter settled over the island. Many of the men developed scurvy and out of the seventy nine that settled on Sainte Croix, thirty-five died that winter. Upon the arrival of spring, de

Monts set out to find a better location for settlement and sailed south along the present day New England coastline. Champlain was in charge of making maps of the coastline and noted the numerous tribes of Indians. It was the heavy population of Indians that convinced de Monts that a settlement there would not last. Discouraged and with winter approaching once again, de Monts returned to Sainte Croix Island. In August of 1605, de Monts sent Captain Pontgrave and Champlain to find another location for settlement. Their choice Port Royal, along the western coastline of Nova Scotia, withstood the winter and proved to be a worthwhile location for settlement. After leaving Port Royal, in 1607, Champlain returned to France. Champlain never returned to the settlement, which lasted until 1613 when it was destroyed by the English.

After his arrival in France, Champlain wasted no time and began planning a settlement further up the St. Lawrence River. Champlain realized that a permanent settlement closer to the source of the fur trade would protect French ships from marauding Indians. Champlain set sail from France and arrived at Tadoussac, the French summer trading post, on June 3, 1608. He immediately set sail, once again, up the St. Lawrence and arrived at the present day location of Quebec on July 3, 1608. There he began the construction of the first permanent French settlement in North America. His “Habitation”, what Champlain liked to call the settlement, consisted of three buildings and a warehouse to hold the furs and trading goods. A moat, exterior palisade and platforms for cannon served as the protection for the Habitation. The harsh winter of 1608-1609 took the lives of sixteen out of twenty-four men, but Champlain remained steadfast in his choice of location. He spent the summer planning for the future extension of the colony upstream before returning to France to report his progress.

Champlain's voyage, in 1611, afforded him the opportunity of exploring the possibility of a second settlement further upstream. The site that was most suitable for his second settlement he called Place Royale. Here he envisioned a French stronghold that would further ensure the protection of the fur trade. Although he realized the value of the location, he did not have the manpower or time to establish a settlement there. It would not be until 1642 that the first construction, of what would later become Montreal, took place.

Champlain had to worry about the survival of the Habitation at Quebec before he could concentrate on further settlement of the interior. The monopoly that de Monts was granted, in 1603, had been revoked early and the free trade was destroying the profitability of the fur trade, which was the source of funds for settlement. In order to solve the issue, Champlain had the private traders form a common company. The company would regulate the trade and also provide money for the maintenance of the Habitation, exploration further west and the construction of additional settlements upstream. The successful implementation of the plan also provided Champlain with more power in New France. His influence in the colonization of New France had grown significantly since the first settlement at Sainte Croix, but Champlain was troubled by the fact that the number of people willing to settle in New France was still minimal.

His time spent in France always focused on selling the idea of colonization not only to the King and his council but to the people of France. Champlain needed families to move to New France to take up the Habitation as their home and to work the land. Champlain was constantly thinking of and implementing ways to further protect the settlement. In 1615, Champlain had four missionaries accompany him to Quebec in

order to convert and hopefully pacify the tribes around the settlement. Although Champlain did much to protect, encourage and popularize the settlement, it was not until 1617 that the first significant number of settlers left for Quebec. Before Champlain embarked on his voyage to Quebec, in 1618, he reminded the King of his intentions to establish the Christian faith, discover the South Sea passage to China and to build a great settlement at Quebec. He promised that if adequate aid was given, the French along the St. Lawrence would be impervious to any human force.

Upon arriving in Quebec, Champlain made repairs and strengthened the fortifications of the settlement. After the fur trade merchants challenged his authority; the King's Council named him Governor of New France. The new title gave Champlain complete control over the settlement, except for the merchant's warehouse. This exception to his authority would prove to be a critical one since the merchant's controlled most of the working men and housed most of the supplies. Champlain did not let this slow him down and, in 1621, he built Fort St. Louis. The presence of Champlain kept the settlement in order and properly maintained. Whenever Champlain departed for France, the productivity of the colonists fell and little was accomplished.

The constant setbacks, due to the failure of the colonists to perform maintenance and improvements to the settlement, angered Champlain but his fortitude and patience helped him persevere. What pained Champlain more than the constant disobedience of the colonists was the loss of the settlement to the English, in 1629. After their arrival at Tadoussac, in 1628, Champlain was in continuous communication with the English. Champlain made it clear that he would not abandon the settlement and he would resist any attempt to take it. Champlain sustained the settlement through the winter, on the

small provisions they had, but was unable to receive supplies because of the English presence along the coast. On July 19, 1629, the English ships reached Quebec and demanded the surrender of the settlement. Champlain without sufficient supply knew that he could no longer resist the claims of the English and handed over Quebec on July 20, 1629.

Before returning to France, Champlain met with the French ambassador in London and challenged the conquest of Canada by the English. When he returned to France, Champlain was restless and he insisted that all paths to restore Canada to the French be taken. It was not until March 29, 1632, that Canada was returned to the French. Before embarking on his final voyage to New France, Champlain was placed in absolute control of the St. Lawrence. Not only was he in control of the settlement, but now he also had full control over the trading company. Champlain arrived at Quebec on May 22, 1632, and found it in the worse condition he had ever seen it. Champlain spent the next seasons overseeing the rebuilding of the settlement before he died on December 25, 1635.

Champlain's role in establishing New France was matched by no other man and for this his title as the "Father of New France" stands true. His foresight, organization and leadership during the settlement of New France allowed for further settlement to occur and a French stronghold in Canada to take place. It is clear that without the guidance and management of Champlain, the greed and laziness of the men would have left the settlement in an unmanageable state. Champlain was the figure of progression, stability and development in New France; without him, the French settlement may not have survived.

- 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.