

Intro:

One of the features of Pointe au Baril life is that sense of **suspension of time** in everything around us. The rocks have remained unchanged since the last Ice Age and the first human being appeared in North America; the trees alter slowly over long periods. In this landscape there is a sense of a permanence that far exceeds anything that human beings can aspire to.

But in terms of human affairs - **400 hundred years** – in the time that Champlain passed through these parts so much has changed and so much of what was then a very uncertain has been now taken for granted.

400 years ago Spain was still the centre of the earth, having looted the new world with brutal efficiency for over a century. Every Year the Treasure Fleet set off in the late spring for the Carribbean - a great guarded convoy to bring loot from the New World.

By comparison New France was a very tentative venture. Champlain's newly founded settlement in Quebec (1608) had only 75 inhabitants clinging to a tenuous existence, including the mixed aspirations of the Recollet fathers, the Hebert family of farmers and the transient fur traders.

There were similar tiny settlements at Tadoussac, Saguenay, (Acadia and Ste Croix)

There had been a great rush for the New World. But so much of it was transient and impermanent. From France very year fleets of fishing boats would set off from Normandy, St Malo in Brittany and La Rochelle in St Onge to spend the summer season fishing in the gulf of the St Laurence and Grand Banks, only to return home to France in the autumn.

Champlain's Personality:

No other early explorer or settler has left such an indelible imprint on the Canadian imagination or written so much about his experience and exploration as Samuel de Champlain.

Born in 1576 in Brouage, near La Rochelle on the west coast of France, Champlain would have been 39 years old in 1615. It was his 25th transatlantic crossing, all without mishap. He gained a reputation among his seamen for astonishing good luck.

He had been born in a Protestant part of France, St Onge, a fishing and salt trading seaside community, in a century of horrendously violent religious warfare between Catholics and Protestants which included such events as the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre.

Henry IV or Henri the Great or Henry of Navarre was a compatriot, also born in nearby La Rochelle, also a Protestant and also endowed with a similar free spirit. It was Henri who negotiated the Treaty of Nantes in 1598 which established a right to freedom of religion for the Protestants. He also unified France and achieved the Treaty of Vervins which allowed the withdrawal of Spanish troops from France and agreed a notional division of the New World between France, Spain and Portugal.

In Champlain's birthplace, the seaside town of Brouage, famous for its Royal Black salt, Champlain was born to a seafaring family and grew up watching the comings and goings and hearing stories of the New World. In 1598-9 he actually made a trip with the Spanish Treasure fleet which every year embarked from Cadiz and entered the Caribbean to gather loot from the new world. Champlain was stationed as **observer** on a galleon that the Spanish had leased from his uncle, a legendary Falstaffian character know in all the ports. And **observe** he did.

On that expedition, aged 23, he saw the Spanish in action, the rebuilding of Puerto Rico defences after its sacking by the British. Everywhere he went he sketched and kept detailed notes of what he saw. He spoke to natives and negro slaves and began to understand the ruthless efficiency of the Spanish in exploiting their domain. He noted and sketched everything.

From his notes he shows himself an inquisitive mind with a considerable admiration for the varied humanity that he encountered. He was a free thinker, like his protestant forbears, and he talked to the victims of the Spanish rule as well and was quite evidently horrified by the savage greed of the system set up by the conquistadores.

1603:

In 1603 he was tasked by his patron Henry to explore deep into the St Laurence and report on the potential for establishing a permanent colony, a New France. In his account *Des Sauvages*, he describes the first meeting or 'Tabagie' with the natives, it sounds like a very chilled party, he describes the laconic nature of the Indians, the long reflective gaps in the conversation, the smoking asides, and suggests how he was able to build trust and admiration in the native community.

The success of his writings addressed to the King led to his commission to set up a new settlement at **Quebec in 1608** and the importation of the first permanent farming settlers to New France, the Hebert family.

Champlain was obviously very personable. He had an eye for spotting talent in unlikely places. He could deal with the bon vivant Henri IV and on the other hand he could identify someone like Etienne Brule in 1610, mentor the 18 year old and arranged that he live among the Algonquin and learn their language.

1615:

Four Hundred Years Ago - In the spring of 1615 Champlain again sailed from Honfleur, his great sponsor, Henri of Navarre had been assassinated 5 years earlier and his widow Marie de Medici and Cardinal Richelieu held the Regency until Louis XIII could come of age. They were no friends of Champlain, deeply suspicious of his free thinking Protestant roots. Henri had unified France and ended a century of bloody conflict by proclaiming freedom of religion and converting to Catholicism (several times) Like Henri, Champlain had converted to Catholicism in

order to further his plans for a New France. Richelieu saw the advantages of power structured around a catholic hierarchy and a single true faith.

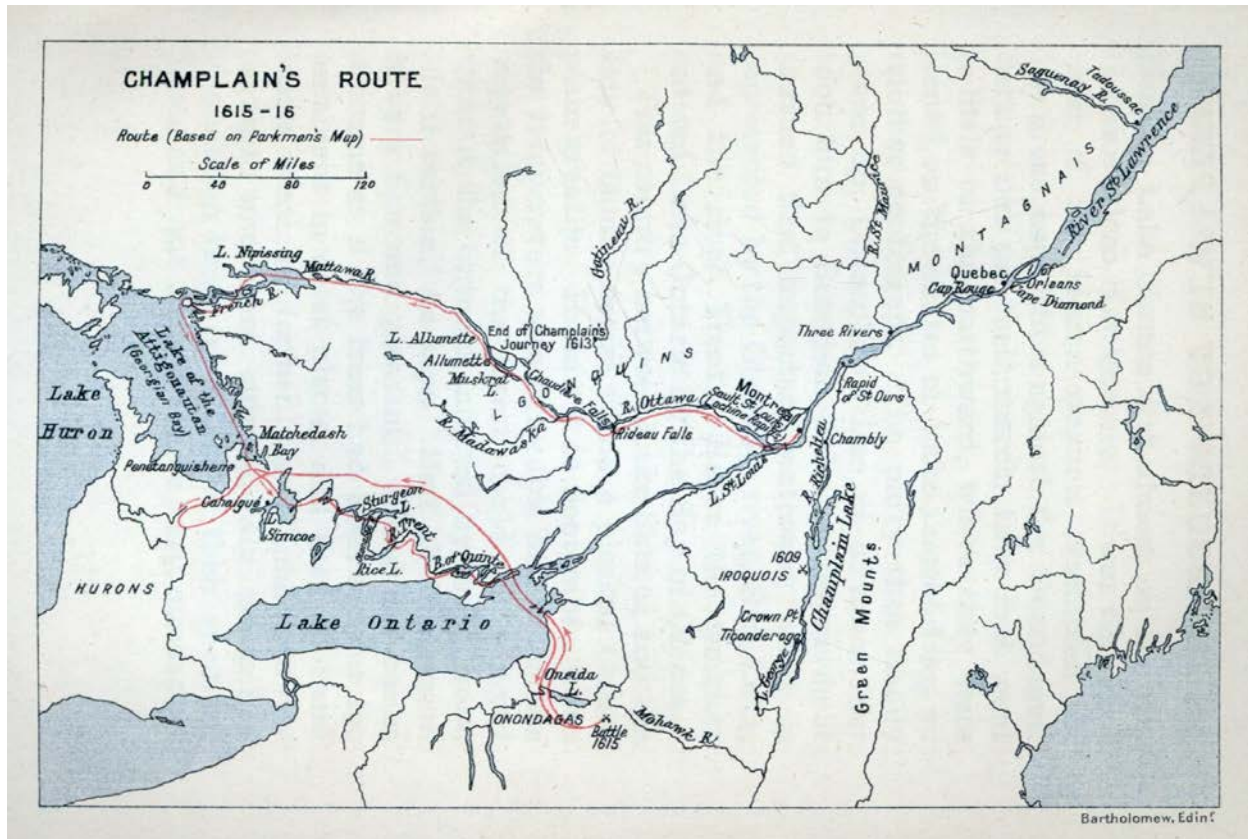
So Champlain set sail from Honfleur backed by the venture capitalist merchants of Rouen and with only the half-hearted backing of Richelieu.

He made Tadoussac on May 25 and then went up river to revisit Quebec on June 2nd. In his few days in Quebec he left instructions for rebuilding and for the planting of formal gardens, which mirrored the world as he would like to see it.

The **Montaignais and Algonquin Indians** had complained that the Iroquois League of Indians from south of the St Laurence had been making devastating incursions into their territory. The Iroquois threatened the viability of all of the tiny settlements that comprised New France.

They asked Champlain to support them on a retributive raid of the Iroquois Onondagas.

Champlain arranged to meet them at the Lachine Rapids (now Montreal) around July 4th. But the '*nations*', as he called them, did not show up.



Choosing a **safe route** to avoid attack from the Iroquois Confederacy, Onondaga and Oneida Indians, Champlain then set off up the Ottawa River into the Mattawa, then Lake Nipissing, down the French River to approach Huronia from the back door. Previously the natives had not encouraged exploration but had brought back detailed descriptions of the times travelled to reach the great water bodies to the west or the salt sea to the north.

He vividly describes the rough terrain and rules out the prospect of farming any of the land. The scale of the Georgian Bay, the Mer Douce was astonishing to him and he describes rapturously the scale of the water body and the size of 4' trout and 9' sturgeon caught.

They did not linger long - they were on a mission and the destination was Huronia. It took them 2 days to pass from the mouth of the French River the full length of the Georgian Bay into Nottawasaga Bay into Huron territory.

In Huronia he was astonished to find an agricultural nation occupying well cleared lands, fields of 1000 acres planted in corn. He estimated 30,000 inhabitants. They were living in well-fortified palisade settlements. At **Carhagouha** he found a triple palisade, protecting 4 storey buildings . He describes all the crops being grown for trade, corn, squashes, sunflowers, raspberries and strawberries and nuts.

At Caihague on Lake Simcoe he found a town of 6,000 inhabitants, 200 common lodges and a 7 row palisade. The raiding party assembled there and set off through Lake Simcoe portaging into the Trent River, the down to the Bay of Quinte across Lake Ontario and into Iroquois territory. They concealed their boats and then proceeded stealthily on foot to seek out the Onondaga stronghold at Lake Oneida.

Champlain, admired the Natives, he evidently admired their personal dignity and independence but he frequently mentions his despair at their lack of discipline and hierarchy. The element of surprise attack was ruined by over-eager natives. Even the French Arquebusiers with their thundersticks could not prevail. He created an elaborate five storey high European style siege machine platform to attempt to overtake the ramparts.

Back to Huronia:

By October 16th with winter approaching the native marauders withdrew and retreated back to Huronia. Though Champlain judged the campaign a failure it did secure almost 2 decades of remission from Iroquois League attacks.

Champlain had been wounded with an arrow in his knee during the encounter and had to be sledged back to Huronia where he spent the winter among the natives and learned much about their culture, participated in the annual deer hunt where the natives drove the deer into an ingenious palisaded funnel and their hunting skills.

Champlain gained a reputation as an astute judge and resolver of disputes. The native cultures relied on an 'eye for an eye' retribution for injury and this often led to escalation of violence. Champlain though always proceeded slowly and methodically to gather all of the facts of a case brought before him. Quite often the ingenious solution would be the taking of hostages which he would have educated and would learn language and customs from.

Later Life:

Four years later in 1620 Champlain was recalled by the ever suspicious Richilieu. In 1628 Quebec fell to the English when the Kirke Brothers took Tadoussac and Quebec. Even at that time the total population of these settlements was no more than 76 inhabitants.

In 1629 Champlain was sent back to New France after a treaty with the English returned Quebec City. It was there he died in 1635 at the age of 59.

New France certainly had tentative beginnings.

Writings:

Champlain published 4 accounts of his explorations. His earliest extended account 'Des Sauvages' or the Wild Peoples was in 1603 and was a tribute to his sponsor Henri IV of Navarre.

Today Des Sauvages makes riveting reading. Champlain is interested in everything. In the nature of great explorers nothing escapes his notice. – and he reveals a very different attitude from the Spanish conquistadores. He draws maps and illustrates the natives, describing their customs, clothing, buildings, dances, describes their laconic speech patterns, means of communication, their crops and their ingenious hunting strategies. This is one of the best first-hand accounts of what he saw by someone who was astonishingly open minded.

What always comes through in his observations is empathy for others. He found the natives had many admirable qualities. They were generally healthier and better constructed than the Europeans. They had many ingenious inventions, from lightweight canoes to snowshoes.

Perhaps a little like him they were non-hierarchical. They had a surprisingly anarchic ways of arriving at common consensus but then could prove quite disciplined and organised.

Champlain Society:

Three Hundred years later in 1905 the **Champlain Society** was formed in Toronto under Sir Edmund Walker, with a view to publishing these early works. Subsequently they have published settlers' journals and explorers' records and have become an extraordinary resource of Canadian History.

In 1948 my grandfather, an early member of the Society, helped arrange the funding for the construction of the Champlain monument. My grandmother, Isabel, the daughter of Mary Shaw-Wood, who had built Push-Wah in 1906, donated the point.

My grandfather, Thomas Urquhart Fairlie met his wife to be at an Ojibway dance in 1908. He was a young bridge engineer working on the Pointe au Baril bridge and others on the new line.

Over the following 50 years he was deeply involved with the Georgian Bay Association and proactive in setting up fish and game sanctuaries including Fairwood Island. There is a Champlain Park on Fairwood Island and a stone cross that he erected there in the 30's.

Champlain's achievements fired his imagination. It was perhaps Champlain's ability to look with practical eyes at the achievements of others. Champlain was **not a conquistador**, he learned from everything that he saw and he had ideas about creating something better by learning from what he saw.

A bit of parallel history, contemporary with Champlain, the Shaw-Wood ancestor, Captain Ben Wood, was active in the Atlantic from the 1580's and captained one of the ships with Raleigh on the Guyana run. His son Thomas settled in Bermuda and the Wood's shipping company, the Patriotic Company, became one of the largest in the Atlantic with 17 ships taking Adventurers to the disastrous St Jamestown, to Virginia, to New Jersey, and into the Carribean, Guyana,

Grenada and the Turks Islands. They set up an office in Quebec City in 1765 after the fall of Quebec to the English. Their flagship was the Hopewell which is the origin of the name of Hopewell Bay down Shawanaga Bay where Mary Shaw-Wood bought 3 islands for her 3 children.

In those early days there were so many different and often conflicting visions for what the New world might look like:

- Richelieu saw New France as an extension of empire, attempting to emulate the Spanish success in plunder.
- The merchants of Rouen, who sponsored many of Champlain's voyages, only wanted to get on with the business of the fur trade unencumbered by settlers. They wanted armed forts and rigorous suppression of unrest.
- The Recollet Brothers saw a new perfect Catholic world arising after the mayhem of Europe in the last century

But Champlain really saw so much more than others, because he was looking so closely at the people he encountered.

And what's more he carefully recorded his observations. He skilfully navigated the murky politics at cross purposes. He really did prepare a way for others to follow.