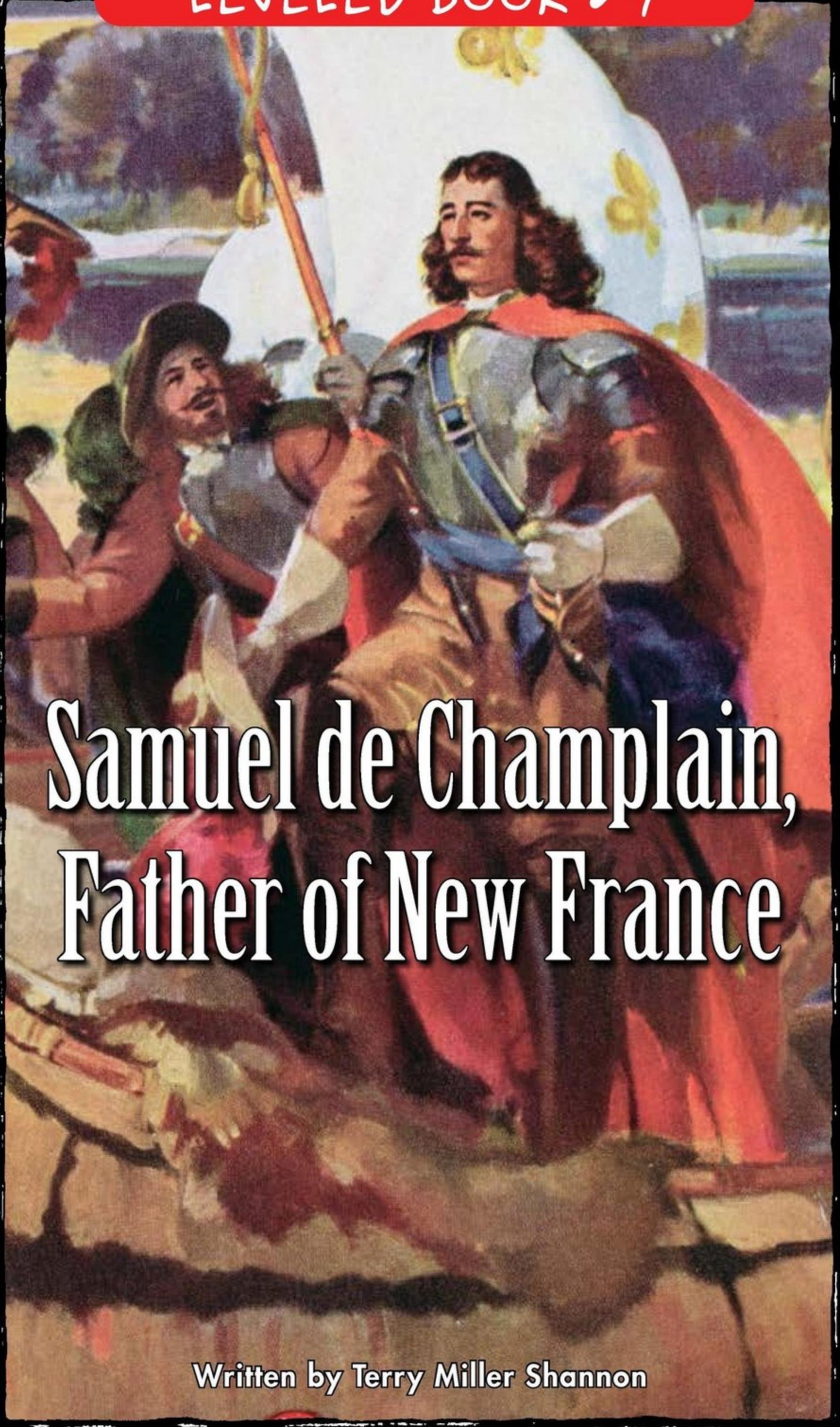


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Samuel de Champlain, Father of New France

Written by Terry Miller Shannon

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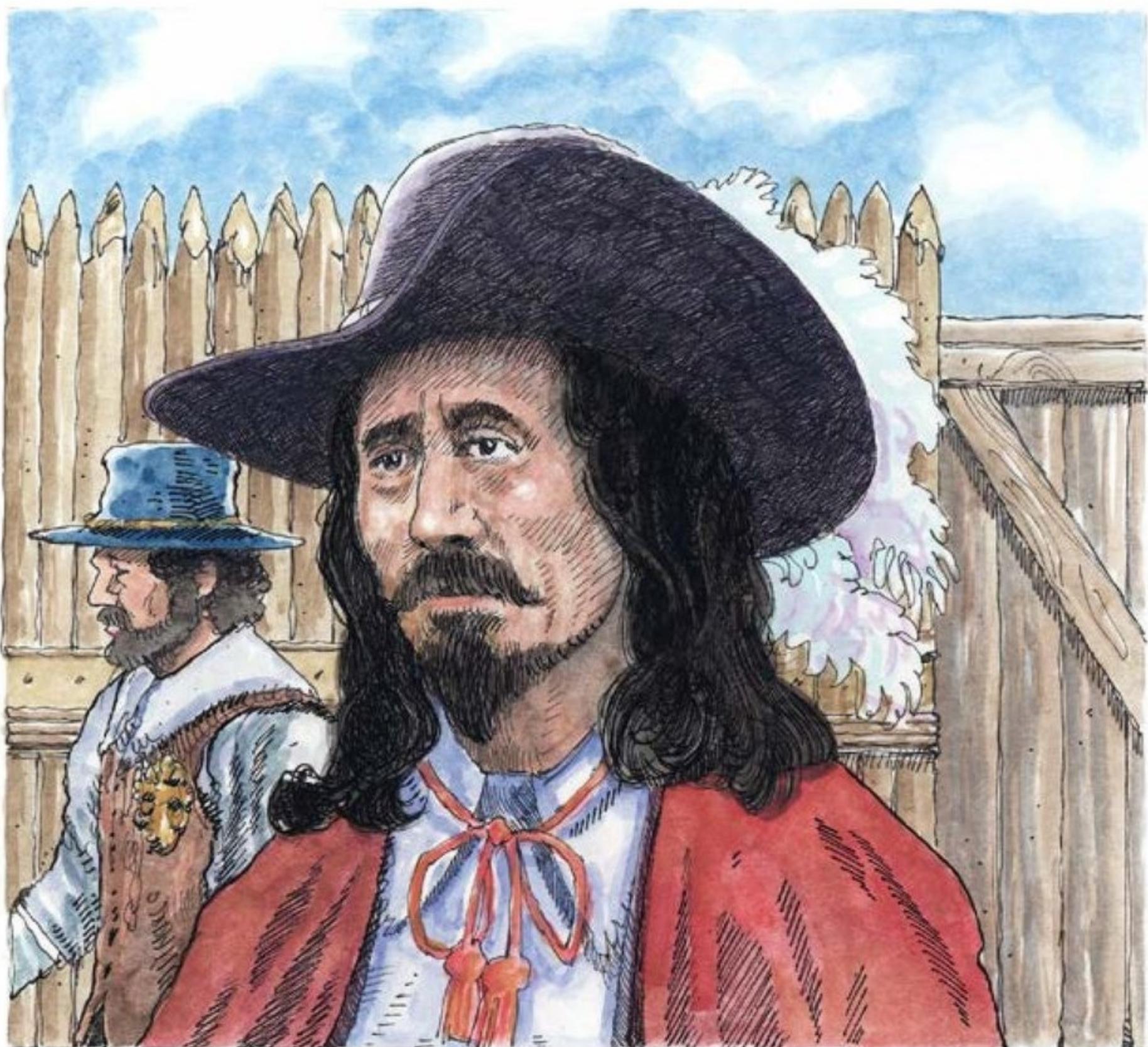
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Champlain's first encounter with native people of North America

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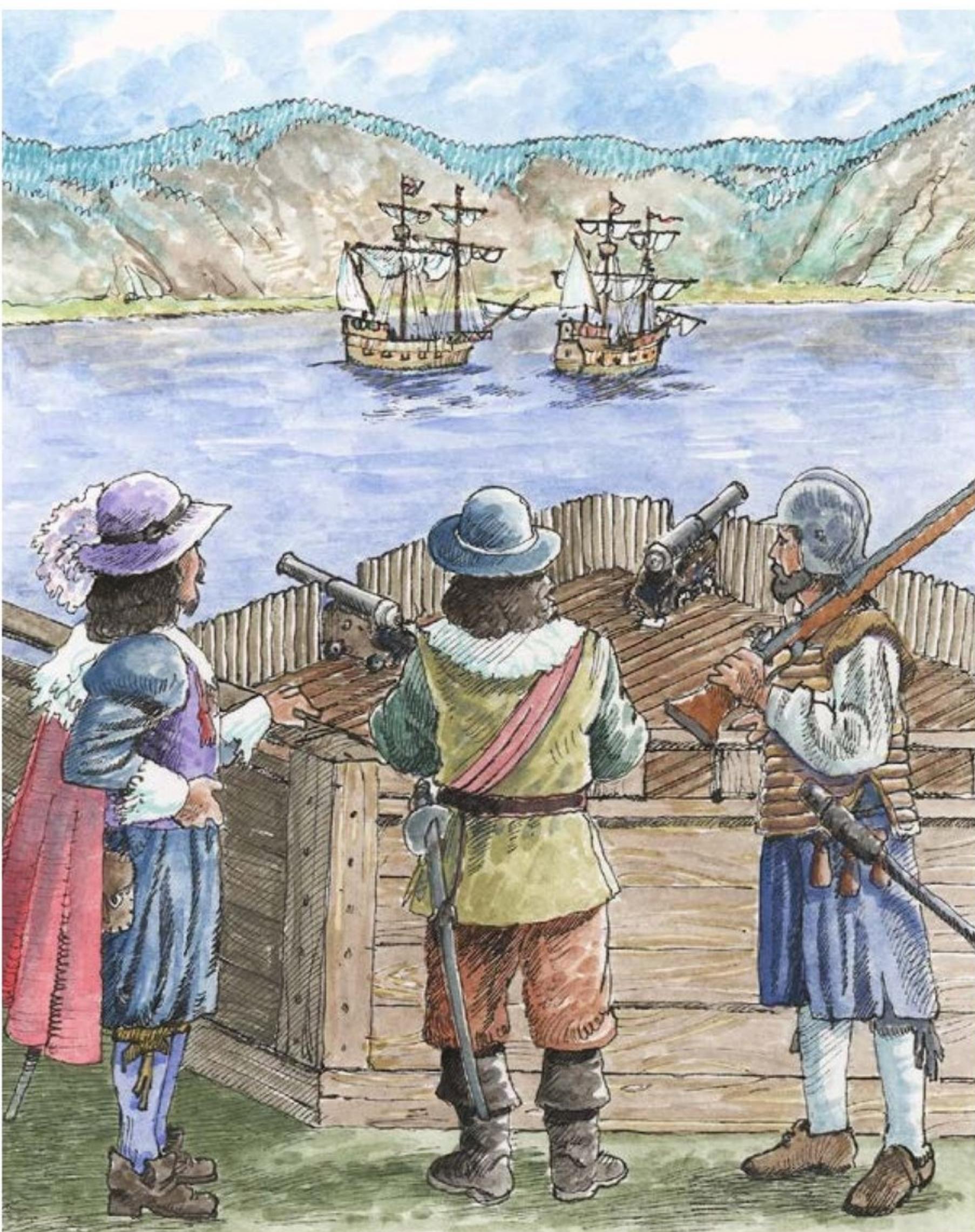
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A Prisoner of the English

Gazing beyond the wooden walls of his fort, Samuel de Champlain was greatly **distressed**. As he looked down upon the St. Lawrence River, the French explorer and **colonist** realized that everything he had worked so hard for was approaching ruin. The time was July 1629. The place was Quebec, a trading **settlement** founded by Champlain on the edge of the North American wilderness. This huge area, known as New France, would later be called Canada. Champlain called it home.

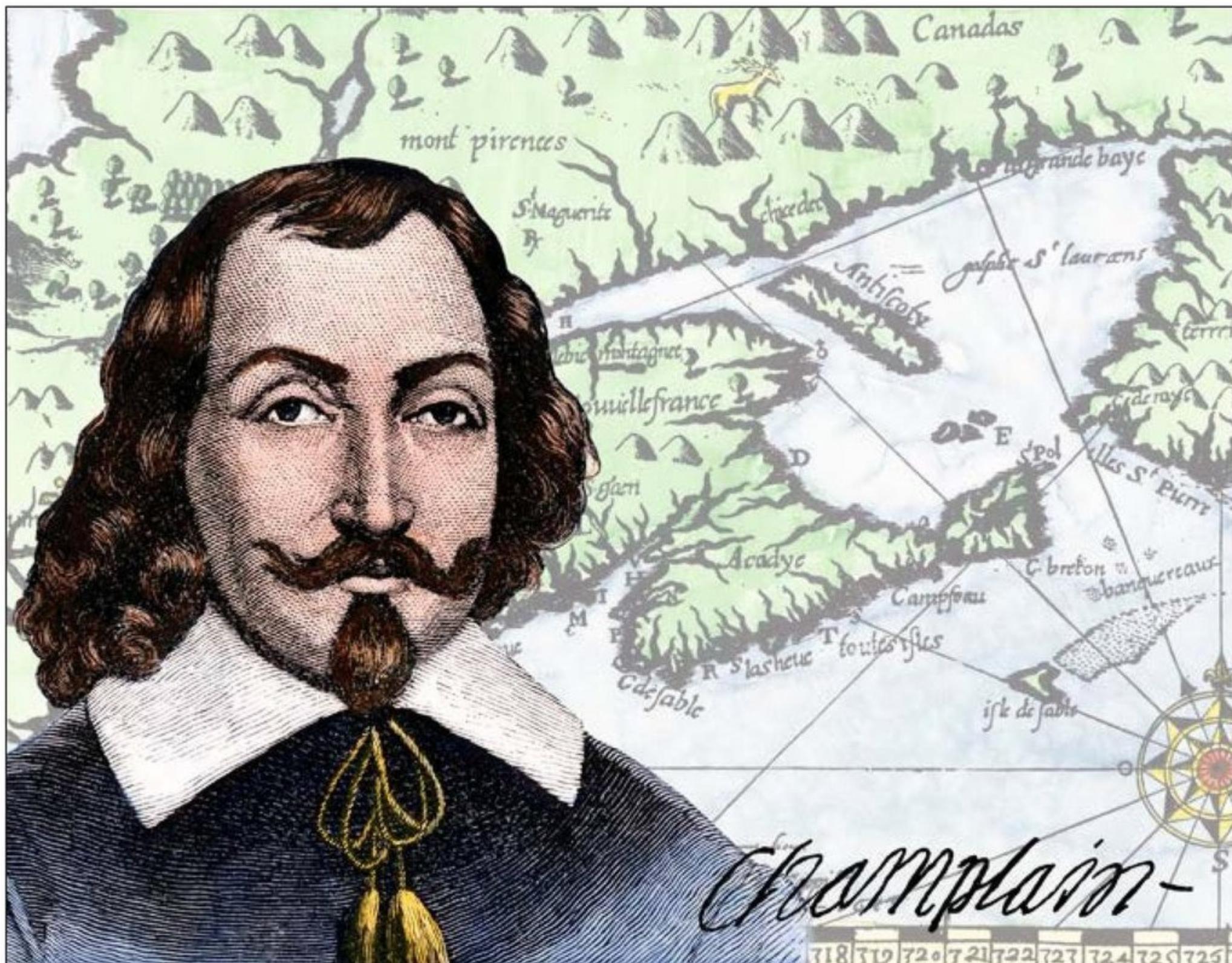
But it wouldn't be his home much longer. In the river next to the fort, English ships bobbed at anchor. The vessels were under the command of David Kirke, a private English sea captain and adventurer, and his brother Lewis. The Kirke brothers—five in all—had been **appointed** by England to capture New France.



The Kirke brothers' **siege** of Quebec was part of a larger war between France and England. France and England had been fighting each other on and off for the last five hundred years. And with control of North America now at stake, there would be more wars to come. The New World was rich in resources, including timber, animal furs, minerals, and land. It was a very valuable prize to be won.

Champlain had done his best to **establish** a secure French foothold in the New World. But now he could see that his situation was hopeless. He had fewer than one hundred people in the fort, including no more than eighteen fighting men. To make matters worse, almost all the food was gone. The defenders were starving.

On July 16, to prevent any further suffering, Champlain surrendered the fort. He asked David Kirke for permission to take his settlers back to France. Kirke refused. Instead, the captain made Champlain his prisoner and put him and the other French colonists aboard the English ships. As the ships sailed for England, the defeated Champlain must have wondered if he would ever see New France again. He must also have wondered if New France would even continue to exist.



No real portrait of Champlain exists. Most drawings of Champlain, including the one shown here, are based on a portrait of a different French official that was made in 1654.

Who Was Champlain?

Our knowledge of Samuel de Champlain is incomplete, especially the details of his early life. He was born in the town of Brouage, near the western coast of France, sometime around 1567. Champlain's father, a sea captain, taught Samuel how to **navigate** across the ocean. Samuel went on several voyages with his father and uncle—another seaman in the family—to polish his navigational skills. During this time, he also became an expert mapmaker.

Champlain spent most of his twenties serving in the French army. In 1598, he began sailing with his uncle on long voyages to Spanish territories in the New World (now the Caribbean). During all his travels, Champlain sketched local plants and animals, taking notes to describe them. Back in France in 1602, Champlain presented King Henry IV with a book of his sketches and descriptions.

King Henry was impressed with the young sea voyager. He was convinced that Champlain

would be a good choice to help strengthen France's position in the New World. The king wanted to create more colonies to ensure French access to the riches of the North American continent. The colonies would be **populated** with French settlers and held with military force against other nations.



Champlain drew these sketches of natives of North America.

First Trip to North America

In 1603, King Henry sent Champlain to New France as part of a group interested in trading with the Indians for furs. One of the main reasons for establishing posts in North America was to obtain furs, mainly beaver pelts. For centuries, beaver pelts had been highly valued in Europe. Hats made from beaver pelts were popular fashion items.

By the early 1600s, the beaver population of Europe had been nearly wiped out to satisfy the demand for beaver hats. But North America had huge numbers of beavers. King Henry instructed Champlain to find a good **site** to establish a fur-trading colony. He also gave him a second assignment: to search for the Northwest Passage, a water route through North America that would provide a shortcut to Asia.

By the early 1500s, explorers had determined that the Americas extended in an unbroken land mass from the Arctic to the tip of South America. So the only route west to the Pacific Ocean and Asia would be one through or above North America. Many explorers searched for a water route through the North American continent, but none of them ever found it because it didn't exist.



Recently, melting arctic ice has opened up a real Northwest Passage that ships can use during the summer months.

The Search for the Northwest Passage

Finding a northern sea lane to the markets of Asia—a Northwest Passage—was the goal of many European explorers. The normal sea route from western Europe to Asia went around the Cape of Good Hope and the southern tip of Africa. The route around Africa was long, and the huge waves of the southern latitudes made it very dangerous. Merchants had long desired to find a shorter, safer route to Asia. Christopher Columbus had been searching for such a route in 1492 when he ran into the Americas.

Champlain's group set sail in two ships in March 1603. After being tossed by violent storms during a ten-week voyage, they entered the St. Lawrence River. They dropped anchor at Tadoussac, a harbor where the Saguenay (SAG-uh-nay) River meets the St. Lawrence.

The next day, Champlain had his first encounter with the Indians of New France. A group of about a thousand Indians from several tribes had gathered on the far side of the Saguenay River. Singing and beating drums, they celebrated a victory over their shared enemy, the Iroquois (EER-oh-kwaw).

Champlain crossed the river to meet the Indians. This was not their first experience with Frenchmen. The northern wilderness had been claimed for France in 1534 by a French explorer, Jacques Cartier (kar-tee-YAY). Cartier failed in an attempt to found a colony in New France, but he opened the French fur trade.

With the aid of an Indian who spoke French, Champlain became acquainted with a chief of the Montagnais (mon-ten-NAY) tribe. The chief said he hoped the French would help them **vanquish** their enemy, the hated Iroquois.

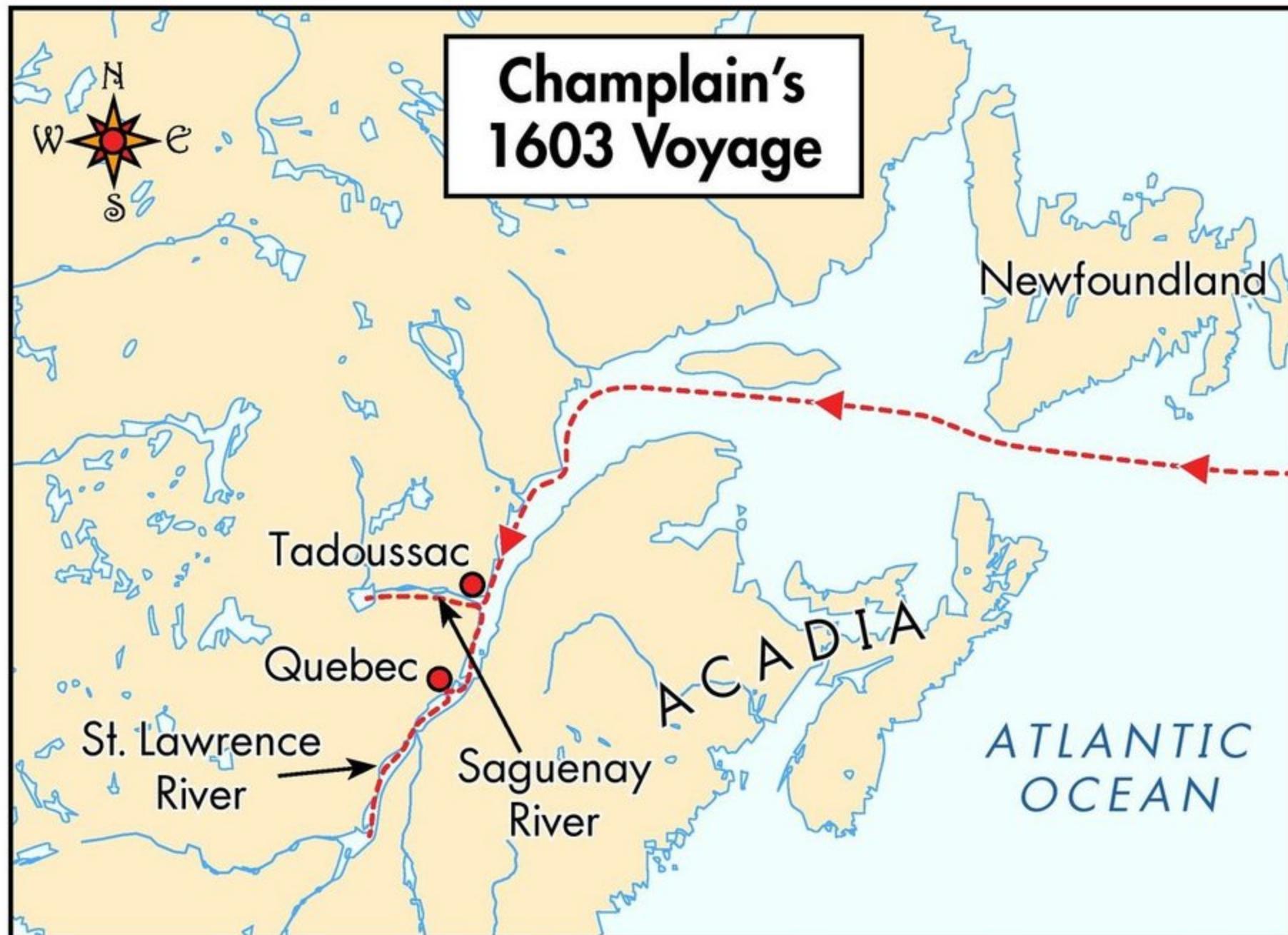


Native Americans trade furs with European sailors in the early 1600s.

Champlain saw that befriending these tribes offered great possibilities. In return for siding with them against the Iroquois, the Indians might help him explore this new land and expand the fur trade. In the coming years, Champlain would establish close relations with the Montagnais.

The Iroquois

The Iroquois Indians were not a single tribe. They were a confederation of the Mohawks and four (later five) other tribes who spoke related languages. The name *Iroquois* was the French spelling of the name the Algonquins (al-GAWN-kins) applied to their loathed enemies. It meant "Rattlesnakes."



Exploring the St. Lawrence

Once Champlain's men had explored much of the Saguenay River, they set out to explore the St. Lawrence Valley. On the way up the river, he stopped at a spot that the natives called *Kebec*, meaning "where the river narrows." To the French, it became Quebec. Champlain thought it would be the perfect place for a French settlement.

Over several later expeditions, Champlain **ventured** some 1,550 miles (2,500 km) up the St. Lawrence. Champlain was convinced that the rivers and lakes of New France must contain a continuous water route to the Pacific Ocean—the Northwest Passage. But he couldn't find such a route—nor would he ever.

In mid-August of 1603, Champlain set sail for France. After arriving in late September, he traveled to Paris and made his report to King Henry. The king was pleased. To show his faith in Champlain, Henry named him Vice Admiral of France. At this time, Champlain published the first of four books that he would write about his experiences in New France.

Hard Times in Acadia

In 1604, Champlain returned to New France. With him were about eighty male colonists, including laborers, doctors, carpenters, and **missionaries**.

This venture was organized and **financed** by a French merchant named Pierre Du Gua de Monts (pee-AIR doo-GAW day-MONE). King Henry had given de Monts a **monopoly** on the fur trade in a portion of New France. In return, de Monts was required to increase the colonization of New France.

Champlain argued for settling in the St. Lawrence Valley. De Monts, however, chose a more southerly location, in an area known as Acadia. He selected an island they named Sainte-Croix (sawnt-KWAW), in present-day Maine.



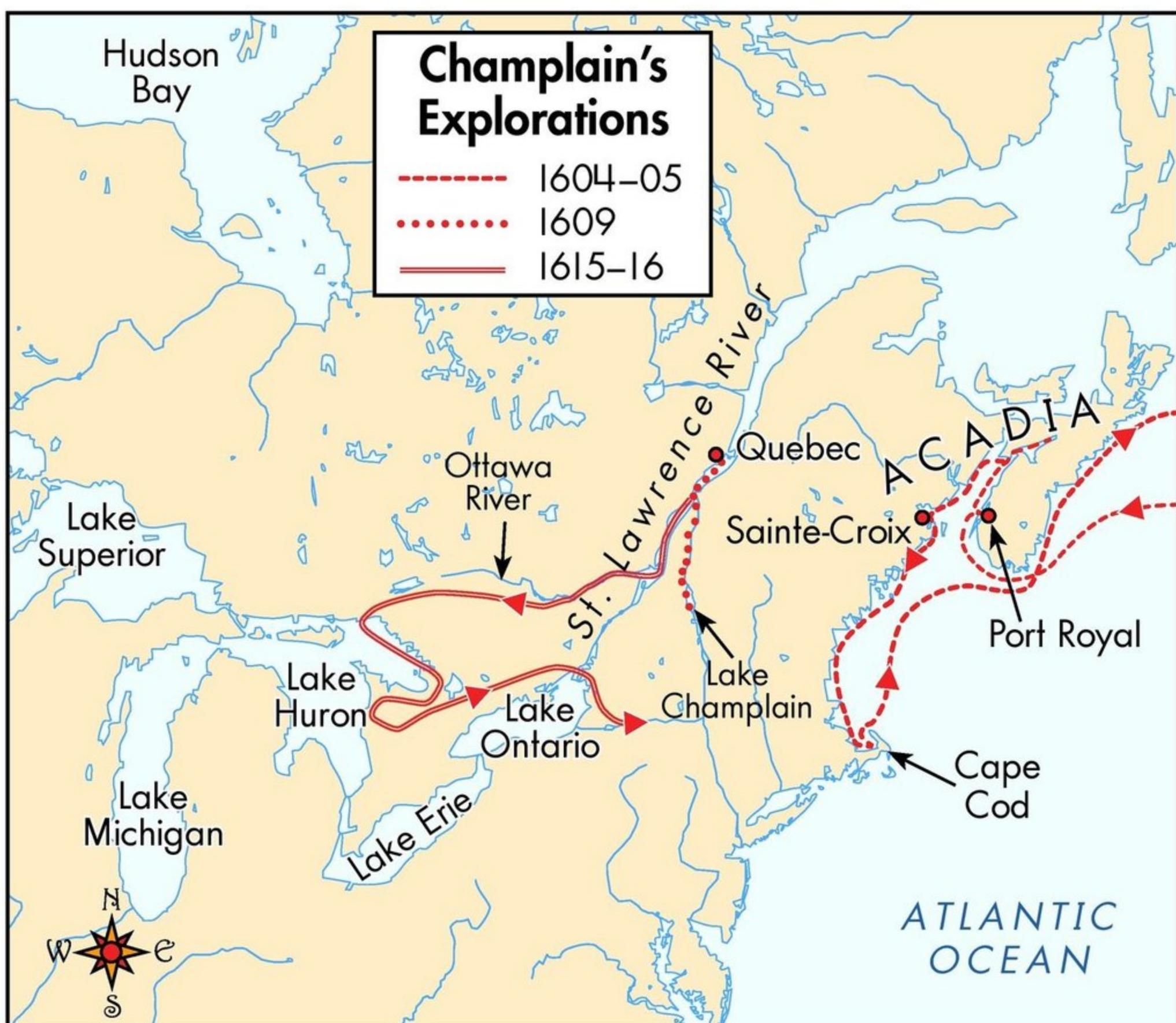
Early explorers and colonists needed steady supplies of fresh fruits and vegetables to keep from getting sick.

The group constructed a storehouse, homes, and other buildings. Then they settled in for what would be a difficult winter.

During that bitter winter, firewood and water were in short supply. The men ate dried foods and salted meat. The absence of fruits and vegetables in their diet caused them to sicken with scurvy, a disease caused by a lack of vitamin C. By the time spring arrived, thirty-five of the men had died.

De Monts then moved the colony to a coastal location that he named Port Royal. This settlement also suffered from scurvy during the winter. But the survivors held on, and Port Royal became a successful farming community.

During the summers, Champlain resumed his explorations. He sailed south along the coast, reaching as far as what is now Cape Cod in the state of Massachusetts. De Monts returned to France in late 1605, but he continued to finance the efforts of Champlain.





A drawing of the settlement at Quebec, based on Champlain's own sketches

The Founding of Quebec

With funding from de Monts, Champlain returned to the St. Lawrence Valley in June 1608 with thirty-two colonists. They anchored at Quebec in July. It was here that Champlain planned to establish a permanent settlement and fur-trading post in the valley.

Champlain put the colonists to work at once. The settlers began constructing a group of houses and other buildings that he called the “**Habitation of Quebec**.”

As the work progressed, the settlement was visited by Indians from tribes in the valley. They reminded Champlain of his promise to help them fight the Iroquois.

Winter came early that year, and it was a bitter one. Within the Habitation, the men began to fall ill. As before, scurvy affected many of them. Twenty of the twenty-eight settlers who stayed for the winter died.

When spring came, it was time for Champlain to make good on his promises to his Indian allies. In July 1609, he and his men, armed with early firearms called *arquebuses* (ar-kway-BOOS-es), joined Montagnais, Huron, and Algonquin warriors in a raid against the Iroquois. Thanks to the booming arquebuses, the Iroquois were defeated.

During this trip south, Champlain came upon a large lake that he named for himself. It is still called Lake Champlain.

In coming years, Champlain and his men would join their Indian friends in other battles against the Iroquois. In one fight, Champlain was wounded by an arrow that struck his ear and the side of his neck. In another battle, an arrow hit him in the leg.



Champlain returned often to France to report on his accomplishments in Quebec and to recruit new colonists. In 1620, Champlain was named governor of New France. Under his **administration**, Quebec expanded and prospered. To strengthen the settlement's defenses, Champlain constructed a fort on Cap Diamant, a rocky cliff overlooking the Habitation. A few years later, he knocked down the fort and built a larger and stronger one. It was in that fort in 1629 that Champlain and his fellow colonists made their final stand before surrendering to the Kirke brothers.

Last Return to New France

When Champlain landed in England in mid-October 1629 after being taken prisoner by the Kirkes, he received unexpected good news: the war between France and England was over. The two nations had signed a peace **treaty** six months earlier. That meant that the Kirke brothers' **conquest** of Quebec and other parts of New France was illegal! The treaty said that any territory won by the Kirkes after the signing of the treaty would be returned to France.

England's King Charles agreed that Quebec and other territory now ruled by the Kirkes

should be given back to France. But the French government owed money to King Charles. The English king delayed handing over the captured territories until the debt was repaid.



Charles I, King of England from 1625–1649

Finally, in March 1632, with the money paid, King Charles agreed to a new treaty returning all of New France to the French. Champlain was free at last to return to Quebec. He wasted no time in making preparations to do so.

In 1633, Champlain returned to Quebec and resumed his duties as governor of New France. Upon his arrival in May, he was greeted warmly by both French colonists and his Indian friends.

Champlain was now in his sixties, and he had led a full life. He was tired and feeling his age. Two years later—on Christmas Day 1635, a month after suffering a stroke—he died.

A Lasting Legacy

Samuel de Champlain's accomplishments as an explorer and settler of the New World won him a secure place in history. Champlain traveled through what are now six Canadian provinces and five American states. His gift for establishing friendships with various Indian nations helped France establish a thriving fur trade and opened new areas for exploration. The little settlement he founded “where the river narrows” became Quebec City, the beautiful capital of the Canadian province of Quebec.



Modern-day Quebec City with Cap Diamant on the right; (left) Shoppers in Quebec City pass businesses and stores with signs in French.

Champlain had hoped that New France would endure as a French colony, but it was not to be. Over a period of about seventy-five years—from 1689 to 1763—

France and England (after 1707, Great Britain) fought four more wars for control of New France. In the end, France was defeated, and its North American territories came under British rule. Even though Quebec officially became part of the British Empire, many elements of its French origins have survived to the present day.

Glossary

administration (<i>n.</i>)	management (p. 19)
appointed (<i>v.</i>)	chosen by one person or a group of people to do a job (p. 5)
colonist (<i>n.</i>)	a person who lives in a colony or is a founder of a new colony (p. 4)
conquest (<i>n.</i>)	the act of invading, taking over, and ruling another area or group (p. 20)
distressed (<i>adj.</i>)	caused to feel extreme sorrow, anxiety, or pain (p. 4)
establish (<i>v.</i>)	to set up a system, organization, or government (p. 6)
financed (<i>v.</i>)	paid for (p. 14)
habitation (<i>n.</i>)	a home or living space (p. 17)
missionaries (<i>n.</i>)	people who travel to another place to spread a religion (p. 14)
monopoly (<i>n.</i>)	a situation in which a single person or company controls all the means of creating or selling a certain type of product (p. 14)
navigate (<i>v.</i>)	to find one's way over a long distance; to steer a course toward a destination (p. 7)
populated (<i>v.</i>)	added people to (p. 8)
settlement (<i>n.</i>)	a new place where people live (p. 4)

siege (<i>n.</i>)	the act of surrounding an enemy for a long time while preventing them from getting food and other supplies (p. 6)
site (<i>n.</i>)	the piece of land where something is located; the location where something is found or took place (p. 9)
treaty (<i>n.</i>)	a formal agreement of peace or friendship between two nations or groups (p. 20)
vanquish (<i>v.</i>)	to defeat in battle (p. 11)
ventured (<i>v.</i>)	dared to go to a dangerous place (p. 13)

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Front cover: Samuel de Champlain exploring the St. Lawrence River in 1603

Back cover: A painting showing Samuel de Champlain's founding of the city of Quebec in 1608

Title page: A beaver felt top hat sits on a beaver pelt at the Fort Langley National Historic Site in British Columbia.

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