

## Samuel de Champlain on Founding Quebec, 1608<sup>1</sup>

*In the early 1500s, French ships made many trips to explore, fish, and trade off the coast of Newfoundland. As business increased, King Henry IV decided that there should be a permanent French colony there. French navigator Samuel de Champlain here describes the events that led to his founding Quebec City on the banks of the St. Lawrence, the river that Cartier discovered on his second voyage in 1535. Based on the fur trade with neighboring Micmac, Montagnais, Abenaki, and eventually Huron Indians, Quebec became the first permanent French town in North America and the capital of New France.*

Inclinations differ according to the diversity of humors,<sup>2</sup> and in the choice of a vocation each individual has his own particular purpose. Some are drawn to profit, others to glory, and some to public service; most to commerce, and mainly commerce at sea, from which come many comforts for people and opulence and adornment for states. This is what raised ancient Rome to lordship and dominion over all the world and lifted the people of Venice to a grandeur equal to that of powerful kings. From all time it has heaped seaport cities such as famous Alexandria and Tyre<sup>3</sup> and countless others with wealth which they in turn spread throughout the earth after foreign nations have sent them what they have of strange and beautiful treasures. This is why many princes have tried to find the northern passage to China: in order to facilitate commerce with people of the East and in the hopes that this route would be shorter and less dangerous. *[After enumerating the unsuccessful attempts by explorers of various nations to find the elusive Northwest Passage, Champlain continues.]*

Despite all these vicissitudes and incertitudes, Lord de Monts<sup>4</sup> wanted to try something unhoped for, and he requested a commission from His Majesty. Realizing that what had ruined previous enterprises was lack of funding for the entrepreneurs, who in one year, or in two, could not get acquainted with the lands and the peoples who live there or find seaports suitable to live in, he proposed to His Majesty a method for financing the attempt without drawing on Royal funds. This would be that he be granted, to the exclusion of all others, the territory's skin and fur trade. This was granted, and he went to great, excessive personal expense. He took with him a great number of men of varying conditions, and there he had lodgings built for his people.<sup>5</sup>

These expenses continued for three straight years. Afterwards, moved by the envy and importunity of certain Basque and Breton merchants, the Council revoked his license, with considerable loss for Monsieur de Monts, who saw his work all come to nothing and had to abandon everything, including all the implements with which he had furnished his settlement.<sup>6</sup>

However, he had submitted a report to the King concerning the fertility of the land; and I submitted one on the methods for finding a passage to China without the encumbrances of Northern glaciers or the oppressions of the torrid zone through which our sailors sail twice going to and twice coming from China with immense difficulty and incredible danger. His Majesty therefore commanded Monsieur de Monts to outfit a new expedition and to send men again to continue what he had begun.

This he did. And this time, because of the uncertainty of his commission, he chose a different place,<sup>7</sup> to avoid giving umbrage once again to the envious. He was also motivated by the hope of finding more advantages inland, where people are more civilized and it is easier to plant the Christian faith and establish the kind of order necessary for preserving a country than along the seacoasts, where savages usually live. Also, he wanted to assure inestimable profit for

the King there, and it is to be believed that the nations of Europe will want to deal with people of civilized manners rather than with the fierce and envious humors of people living along the coasts or in barbarous countries.

Discussion Questions:

What did Champlain see as the motives for having a colony?

According to Champlain, what choices were more likely to make a colony successful?

What kind of relationship did he want New France to have with the native peoples of the region?

What kinds of native peoples did Champlain want to do business with? What do his remarks reveal about his beliefs regarding Indians?

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1 Translated by John DuVal from Samuel de Champlain, *Les Voyages du sieur de Champlain de Saintongeois, capitaine ordinaire pour le Roi, en la marine* (Paris, 1613), 1-6.

2 Champlain stamps his narrative with scientific authority by referring to the four so-called *humors* of the human body: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile, to which scholars since ancient times had ascribed varying human personality traits.

3 Alexandria and Tyre are both great ancient cities on the Mediterranean. Tyre (in present-day Lebanon) was founded at least three thousand years ago by the Phoenicians and is noted for its resistance to invasions by Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great. Alexandria (in present-day Egypt) was named for Alexander the Great and was founded more than two thousand years ago.

4 Pierre de Gua, Lord de Monts, to whom King Henry IV gave the charter and fur trade monopoly for New France in 1598.

5 This first colony was in Acadia (Nova Scotia).

6 The competing merchants had successfully persuaded the King to revoke Lord de Monts's monopoly and reopen the fur trade.

7 This new choice was on the St. Lawrence River.