



## **Samuel de Champlain**

**1567? - 1635**

**French Explorer of Canada and the Upper  
Northeastern United States**

**Founder of Quebec and “The Father of New France”**

**SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN WAS BORN** about 1567 in Brouage (broo-AZH), France. His last name is pronounced “sham-PLAIN.” His parents were Antoine and Marguerite Champlain. Antoine was a sea captain.

**SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN GREW UP** on the west coast of France. When he was just a boy, he began sailing with his father. His father taught him how to navigate and make maps. Champlain wrote that he learned “from a very young age the art of navigation, along with a love of the high seas.”

When he was a teenager, Champlain joined the army of King Henry IV of France. He fought in the wars between Catholics and Protestants that were raging in France at that time.

**FIRST VOYAGE TO THE NEW WORLD:** In 1599 Champlain made his first voyage to the **New World**. He would repeat the journey across the Atlantic an amazing 22 times in his life.

On this first voyage, Champlain sailed as part of a Spanish crew. For two years, the crew explored Puerto Rico, Mexico, Columbia, Bermuda, and Panama. In Panama, he suggested that the Spanish build a canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. That idea, the Panama Canal, would become a reality 300 years later.

When Champlain returned to France, he wrote about his travels, illustrated with his own maps. King Henry IV was delighted with his work. He appointed Champlain his royal geographer. He also wanted Champlain to travel back to the New World.

The king had several goals in mind. He wanted Champlain to discover the **Northwest Passage**. From the early 1500s, many people believed that a passage from Europe to Asia existed through what is now Canada. They sought a sea route linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the islands of the Canadian Arctic. That would be a shorter route to the riches of China, and not require sailing around the South American continent.

The King also knew of the gold and silver discovered by Spanish and Portuguese explorers. He wanted Champlain to explore the **New World** for a French claim to that kind of wealth.

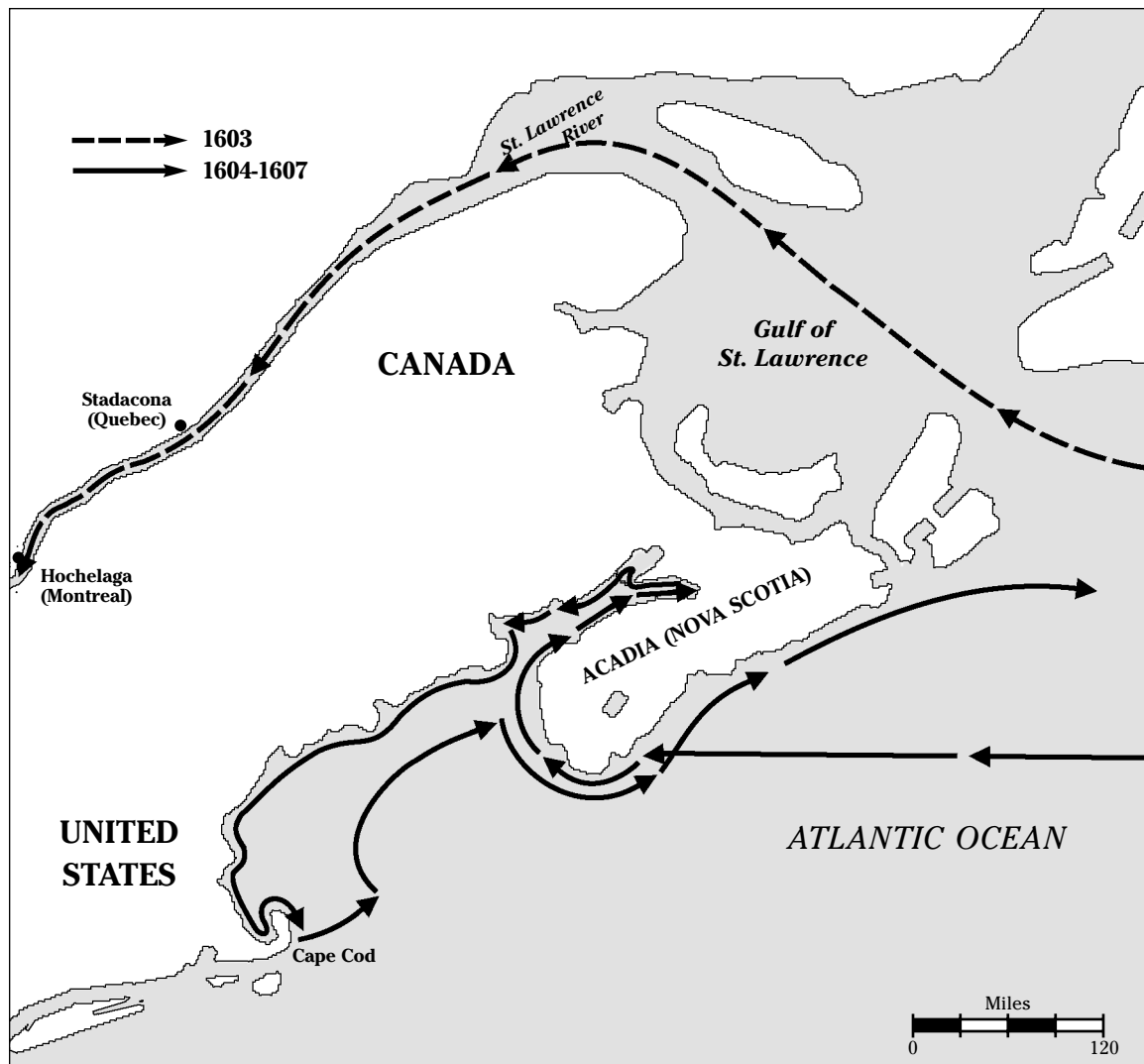
**FIRST VOYAGE FOR FRANCE:** In 1603, Champlain traveled to what is now Canada on an expedition paid for by French businessmen. They wanted to expand their fur trading business in the area.

**NEW FRANCE:** At that time, the area made up of what are now the St. Lawrence River valley, Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia were called “**New France**.” They had been named that on a map drawn by the brother of **Giovanni da Verrazzano** after his earlier explorations in 1525. As the French expanded their settlements, the term New France grew to refer to much of the Great Lakes region.

Champlain traveled up the St. Lawrence River. It had first been navigated by **Jacques Cartier** in 1535. They traveled as far as the Indian settlement Hochelaga (now Montreal). His Indian guides told him of huge bodies of water to the west. The Indians were probably describing the Great Lakes.

Champlain continued down the St. Lawrence River west of the settlement. When he reached rapids, he had to stop. Then he had an idea.

The ships the French explorers used were large and difficult to handle. Champlain decided to use Indian canoes to travel on the rapids. When they hit a spot of rough water, the explorers took their canoes out of the water and carried them overland. When they reached calmer waters, they put the canoes back in the water and continued their journey. That is the origin of the word “portage,” and it is still used today. It means carrying boats or



*Champlain's expeditions of 1603 and 1604-1607.*

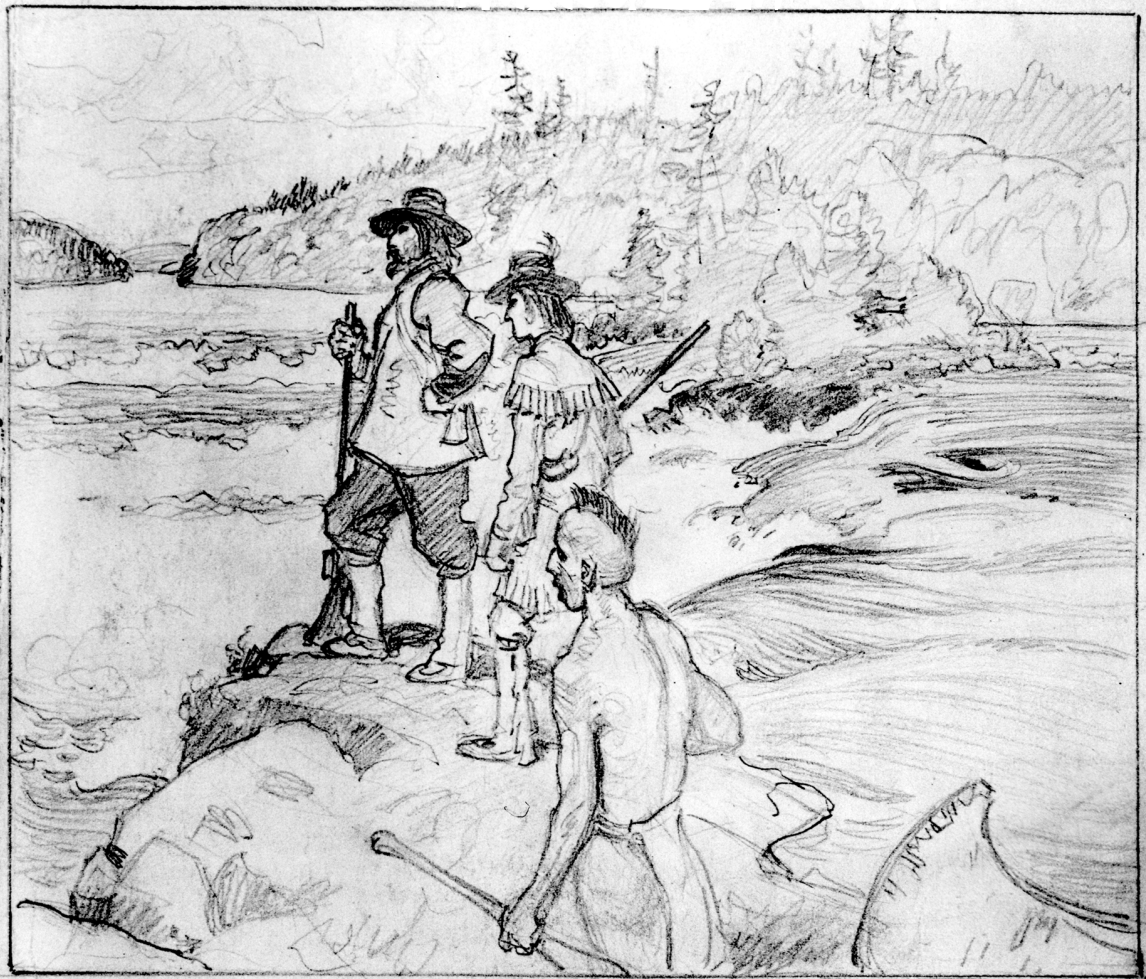
goods between two rivers or bodies of water. Champlain returned to France in 1603, but was soon planning another voyage.

**SECOND VOYAGE:** In 1604 Champlain returned to the **New World**. This time he sailed to what is now the U.S. He traveled with a group of people who hoped to found a settlement. The settlers found a site and began to build a permanent home in what is now Nova Scotia. They called it Acadia.

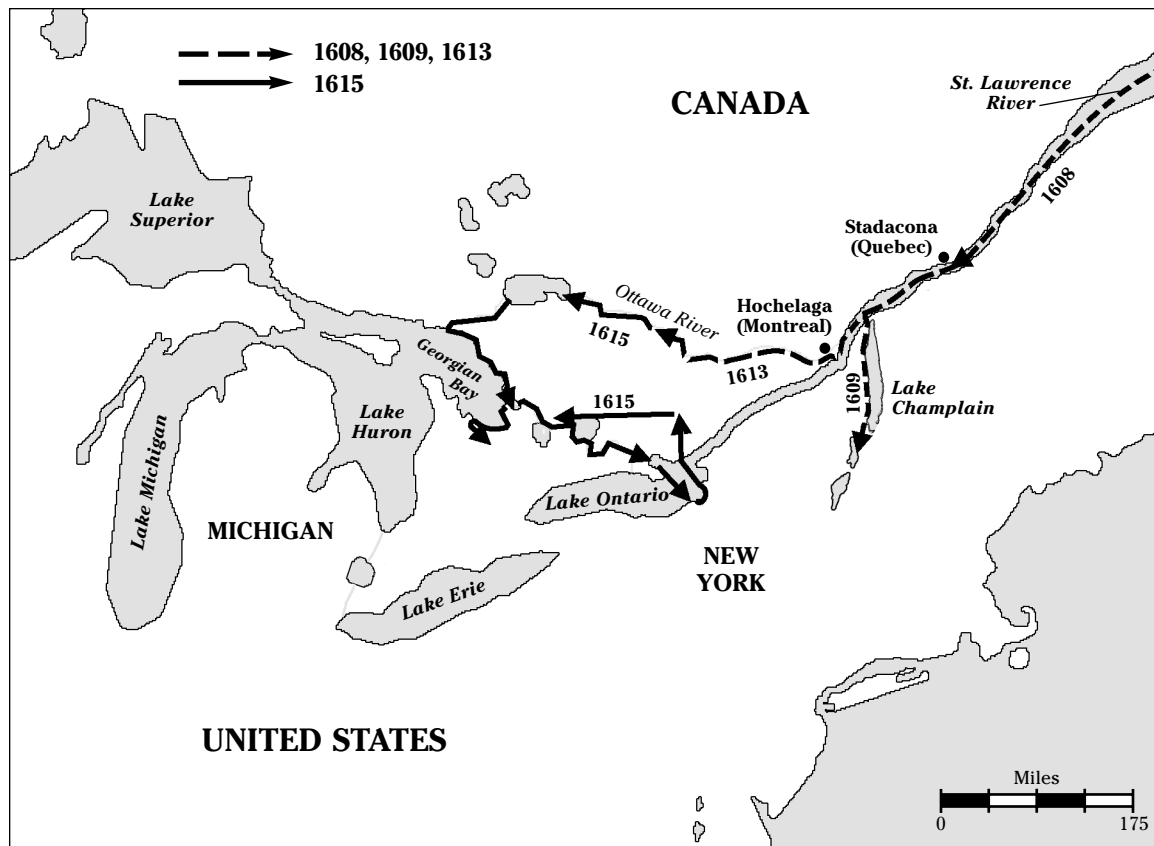


Champlain continued to explore the New World. He journeyed down the east coast of what are now Maine and Massachusetts as far as Cape Cod. He created detailed maps of the area. Meanwhile, the settlers in Acadia faced three harsh winters, and many died. Champlain returned to France in 1607.

**VOYAGE OF 1608:** Champlain returned to the New World once again in 1608. He sailed down the St. Lawrence River to the Indian settlement called Stadacona. There, in July 1608, he founded the



*Champlain and Etienne Brulé on the French River.*



*Champlain's expeditions of 1608-1616.*

city of Quebec. He thought it was an ideal place for fur trade. He also used it as a base for his search for the Northwest Passage.

In 1609, Champlain explored the area south of Quebec and discovered a lake along what is now the border between New York and Vermont. It became known as Lake Champlain. Champlain formed an alliance with the Huron and the Algonquin tribes. Together, they fought the Iroquois. They defeated the Iroquois, but it made the Iroquois enemies of the French for hundreds of years.

**MONTREAL:** In 1611, Champlain built a trading post at what was then the Indian settlement of Hochelaga. It later became Montreal. While building the fur trade business between the French and the

Indians, Champlain also encouraged exploration. He sent younger explorers, including **Etienne Brulé**, to explore beyond Montreal.

Champlain also began to explore inland from Montreal. He continued past the rapids that had stopped him before. In 1613 he explored the Ottawa River. He'd heard that it ended at a huge body of water. Champlain thought it must be the Northwest Passage. They reached Allumette Island, but not the passage. They returned to Montreal.

**LAST VOYAGE OF EXPLORATION:** In 1615, Champlain returned to New France. He explored further into the Great Lakes region. He traveled along the Ottawa River as far as Allumette Island, then west into what is now Georgian Bay in Lake Huron. He traveled across the bay, then into what is now Ontario, overland to the shores of Lake Ontario. Once again he joined a battle between the combined Huron and Algonquin tribes and the Iroquois. The Iroquois won the battle, and Champlain was wounded. He spent several months with the Huron recovering.

**QUEBEC:** Champlain returned to France in 1616. The King wanted him to return to New France to oversee the development of Quebec as a settlement. So he returned to Quebec, where he spent the next years developing the colony.

**WAR WITH ENGLAND:** By this point, the English had also settled portions of the region. They went to war with France several times over the next 150 years, fighting to control trade and the right to settle the area. In 1629, Champlain was taken prisoner in a skirmish with the English. He was taken to England, where he was



*Champlain leaving Quebec as a British prisoner, 1629.*

imprisoned for three years. Quebec was briefly under English control.

After his release, Champlain returned to Quebec. The colony had returned to the French in 1633. He lived there until his death in December 1635. At the time of his death, the colony had 150 people. It would grow to become one of the greatest cities in Canada.

### **SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN'S HOME AND FAMILY:**

Champlain married a young woman named Helene Bouelle in 1610, on one of his visits home. She stayed in France until 1620, then joined her husband in Quebec.

**HIS DISCOVERY:** Champlain was one of the most important French explorers and a major colonial leader. He founded the city of Quebec and gained the name “Father of New France.”

### **WORLD WIDE WEB SITES:**

[http://www.civilization.ca/vmnf/explor/champ\\_e2.html](http://www.civilization.ca/vmnf/explor/champ_e2.html)

<http://www.mariner.org/age/biohist.html>