



## The Champlain Society's Digital Collection Celebrates a Milestone

The year 2010 marks the tenth anniversary of the conception of the Champlain Society's Digital Collection (<http://link.library.utoronto.ca/champlain/search.cfm?lang=eng>). It was in 2000 that the Society's Council, led by president Ian E. Wilson, set in motion a plan to digitize the Champlain Society's backlist of volumes and make them available in full text, free-of-charge, to anyone, anywhere, with access to the World Wide Web. This was a bold initiative, one that forced the Society to confront head-on the emerging communication realities of a new century.

There was some concern at first that the digitization project would in some way devalue the Society's printed volumes, or have a negative impact on membership. This has not been the case. The Society still produces the cloth-bound printed volumes for members, and demand for these is increasing. The digital volumes actually work in tandem with the printed volumes, and certainly allow for quick and accurate keyword searching across the set. More importantly, the digital collection has provided an excellent opportunity to share the Society's wealth of scholarly work with a wider audience, and at the same time prove to members that their investment in the work of the Society, sometimes over many years, will continue to pay creative dividends in the future.

One of the first necessities of the plan was to find a host for the site,

and to arrange for the digitization of the volumes. The Society was fortunate to enlist the aid of the University of Toronto Library, which agreed to digitize the material and to design and host the website as part of its Local Digital Special Collections. The project was coordinated by Karen Turko, a librarian at the Robarts Library and member of the Society's Council. High-quality digitization, and the creation of a large website, is an expensive venture and could not have been undertaken without generous support from the Society's members, as well as support from foundations and corporations, particularly the CRB Foundation, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC), the Historica Foundation, the Hudson's Bay History Foundation, the Millennium Partnership Fund, the RBC Foundation, the University of Toronto Press Inc., and the Wilson Foundation.

Progress was steady, and by 2009 the Champlain Society's Digital Collection included eighty-three volumes, dealing with Canadian exploration and discovery over three centuries. In October 2009, eighteen more volumes were added, for a total of 101 volumes (comprising almost 50,000 printed pages) available for examination or download for free.

The Society's Council has agreed that volumes will be added to the site five years after the date of their pub-



The collection contains 101 of the Champlain Society's volumes (almost 50,000 printed pages) dealing with exploration and discovery over three centuries. It includes first-hand accounts of Samuel de Champlain's voyages in New France as well as the diary from Sir John Franklin's first land expedition to the Arctic, 1819-22.

Search or Browse

Search in  for

All words (AND)
  Any word (OR)
  Exact phrase

Browse by:
  Author
  Title
  Subject

lication. The most recent volume on the site is James C. Reaney's *The Donnelly Documents: An Ontario Vendetta* (2004). During 2010 we will be adding Émile Petitot's *Travels around Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes, 1862-1882* (2005), as well as the first two occasional publications that were published by the Society.

Reports of the website's access statistics show how popular the site has become. During 2009, there were about 1,000 unique visitors to the site every month, many of whom made more than one visit. They viewed about 400,000 pages during the year. Use of the site was linked to the school year, with September through March being the busiest months. The site receives visits from around the world, but American regularly outnumber Canadian visitors more than two to one, and there is also considerable use by visitors from Britain, countries of the European Union, and South Korea.

The Champlain Society has made a successful leap into the digital century!

**-By Don McLeod, Secretary of the Champlain Society and Librarian at the University of Toronto**

## Catharine Wilson Wins the Chalmers Award

Professor Catharine Wilson of Guelph University won this year's Chalmers Award for Ontario History for her *Tenants in Time: Family Strategies, Land and Liberalism in Upper Canada*, which was published by McGill-Queen's University Press. The selection committee, headed again by Dr Françoise Noël of Nipissing University, recognized that "this groundbreaking work has pushed the boundaries outwards into the previously unexplored subject of tenant farming. Since tenancy did not fit well into the dominant liberal ideology of the time, the subject was generally ignored by contemporaries and then by historians writing about Upper Canada." The jury also noted that "in exploring the complexities of landholding and tenancy, Wilson analyses the ways in which different types of tenancies fit into family strategies. Within this context even the often-maligned clergy reserves

emerge in more favourable light as they provided some of the best long term leases that farmers could use to improve their capital and eventually move into ownership. Based on broad-ranging and exacting research that uses Canadian and international sources, *Tenants in Time* carefully blends a micro-social investigation of Cramahe township within larger

provincial trends. The result transforms historical thought about rural settlement in nineteenth-century Ontario."

Patrice Dutil, Vice-President of the Champlain Society, interviewed Professor Wilson after she received her award during the Annual General Meeting of the Champlain



Mr. Lutzen Riedstra, Administrator of the Chalmers Award, and Dr. Catharine Wilson

Society in Toronto on October 24, 2009.

**PD:** You are going against the grain, so to speak, with this book. We've all read about the "freeholding pioneers" that built Upper Canadian Society and tenants have all been ignored. What compelled you to tell this story?

**CW:** I love mysteries and it was a mystery to me why we didn't know more about tenancy. My first book explored the leasehold system in Ireland and its adaptation on Amherst Island, Ontario (*A New Lease on Life*) and I suspected that tenancy was common elsewhere though it puzzled me that evidence was scarce. I also had experienced the situation, like other people doing genealogy, of knowing that people had lived on a particular lot but not being able to find them in the land registry. Then I found aggregate statistics from the 1842 census that indicated that ¼ to ½ of the population rented their land. This inspired me to search the land records, court records, and estate papers not usually used by others which might throw light on tenancy.

**PD:** Tell me about Cramahe County, Ontario.

**CW:** Cramahe Township's fabulous records made this project come alive. The census taker for 1842 in Cramahe, Northumberland County, was

one of the few individuals to carefully and properly fill out the categories regarding tenancy. His detailed, legible accounting allowed me to identify landlords and tenants in that year and whether they rented on shares, for cash, or had long leases. I was then able to link them to nearly a full run of censuses and assessments from 1802 until 1871

and land records. In this way I was able to understand the role tenancy played in family strategies to farm, to climb the agricultural ladder to ownership, or to transmit rented land and improvements to the next generation. Working closely with nearly 100 tenant farmers, I soon knew them on a first-name basis. There was VanWicklan the honest old Dutchman, Yerrington who had the only pleasure wagon in the township, and Shannon with 9 small children and arrears.

**PD:** What were typical characteristics of a tenant family?

**CW:** Tenants might be the sons of local farmers who were trying out farming on their own or renting from their fathers. They might be recently arrived immigrant families, with children in their teens, who couldn't afford to buy right away and wanted to try out farming in a new country before they invested their money in

buying land. Sometimes tenants were retired farmers who had handed over the farming operation to their son and now lived on the property as tenants. In this way tenancy worked as a family strategy at both ends of the life cycle.

**PD:** What was the economic role of tenants?

**CW:** Tenants helped transform wild land into workable farms. They cleared the land, built houses and barns and contributed to the local agricultural economy with their marketable surpluses. They contributed just like owners by building their share of the roads, participating in the agricultural society and local social life.

**PD:** It seems that tenants had a surprising concept of ownership. What did you find?

**CW:** Tenants had the legal ownership of their lease meaning they could sell

it or bequeath it. They also had the customary right to re-enter the property once the lease was over and harvest crops they had planted. Even more important was their customary right to own the improvements they had made such as cleared fields and buildings. When they left the property, they sold these to the incoming tenant or the landlord. A vibrant market existed for leases and improvements about which we have really known nothing.

**PD:** What were the features of the landowner-tenant relationship?

**CW:** They were surprisingly inactive for an era known internationally for its anti-landlordism and land wars. I argue that tenancy worked for them. Many different contractual agreements were available to suit most needs, landlords were often ordinary farmers, and government Crown and clergy reserves had long leases and excellent terms.

## Champlain Watch: Winter of 1609-10

Four hundred years ago at the only drawing in the spring of about this time, we have of him, 1610.

Champlain was firing his infamous arquebus).

He had left Quebec a year after building the Habitation in 1608. It had been a difficult year, as most of the men who had stayed with him on the shores of the St-Lawrence did not survive the winter.

In the summer of 1609, Champlain participated in an assault of Iroquois positions at Ticonderaga (and

turning to Canada in the spring of 1610.

Champlain was firing his infamous arquebus).

The settlers who had stayed behind survived the winter of 1609-10 comparatively well. They were able to hunt and had fresh meat at their disposal most of the time. "By doing without salt provisions and having fresh meat," Champlain concluded, "one's health there is as good as in France."

France, only re-

## Join The Society's Order of Good Cheer

**Patrons of the "Habitation":** This membership category recognizes annual gifts over \$5,000 that create a strong foundation to sustain the Society's mission and goals.

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Send us your new information so we can keep in touch with you. Mail it to the address at the right or email [info@champlainsociety.ca](mailto:info@champlainsociety.ca).

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## With Us!

Upcoming Events  
& Publications

The Society is pleased to present the following schedule for its publications, which may be subject to change as projects unfold during the coming years:

- *The Works of Samuel de Champlain: Des Voyages*, 2nd Edition. Edited by Conrad Heidenreich and Janet Ritch. 2010.
- *The Voyages of Pierre-Esprit Radisson*. Edited by Germaine Warkentin. 2011
- *The Moravians*, Edited by Linda Sabathy-Judd. 2012.
- *William Ord Mackenzie: The Canadas during the 1830s*. Edited by Sandra Alston and Cicely Blackstock. 2013.
- *John Holmes: A Canadian in Foreign Affairs*. Edited by Hector McKenzie. 2013.
- *The Halifax Explosion*. Edited by Shirley Tillotson, David Sutherland and Peter Twohig. 2017.

For more than 100 years, **The Champlain Society** has increased public awareness of and access to Canada's rich documentary heritage. Our goals are

- to publish Canadian documentary materials edited and produced to the highest standards both for members of the Society and for the public at large;
- to assist the Canadian public to a better understanding of the nation's past through occasional public lectures, seminars, colloquia, conferences and the publication of occasional papers;
- to serve as an advocate on the proper care of and accessibility to Canada's historical records; and
- to increase participation in the work of the Society by enlarging and broadening the membership.



**The Champlain Society**  
[www.champlainsociety.ca](http://www.champlainsociety.ca)

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