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Something Old, Something New: Editorial Explorations



This spring marks the 105th birthday of The Champlain Society. The impulse behind its founding was to create in Canada for the benefit of Canadians a portrait of their history through the publication of original documents that chronicled that past. More than a hundred volumes have been produced and their red-jacketed reality measures the success which the founders were seeking when they met in a board room at the Bank of Commerce in Toronto one May afternoon in 1905. In short, the Society has had a very credible, fulfilling and worthy past—but what of the future? Where are we headed?

Most of our earlier volumes were largely devoted to exploration narratives, military and aboriginal history, and political accounts from the time of Champlain through the nineteenth century. In recent years, however, we have broken away from these traditional topics to expand upon the theme of exploration well beyond the charting of rivers, lakes and distant mountains. We've done this in two ways: first, by revisiting the past with a modern perspective that incorporates fresh methodologies; and second, by broadening the scope of our work to cover the modern era—meaning the twentieth century.

Documents may appear unchanging but their interpretation is not cast in stone. Every generation necessarily views them through a different prism. Moreover, the twentieth century staked out wider interests for systematic and academic exploration—

personality not just places, society as much as setting, ideas as well as economics. Over the last decade the Society has sought to capture some of these fresh perspectives.

Thus a reconnaissance into science and ideas was provided by *The Meaning of Life: The Scientific and Social Experiences of Everitt and Robert Murray, 1930-1964* in 2008. Small-town culture was captured in *The Letters of Adam Hope, 1834-1845* in 2007. Family and sexuality was explored through *The Papers of Harry Cassidy and Beatrice Pearce, 1917-1925* in 2009. These new directions were as much documentary expeditions as any of our earlier volumes, and their pursuit has permitted us to sample some of the new frontiers in the Canadian experience that have emerged in the past 150 years.

But the Champlain Society is not abandoning the early explorers. This year's volume will be a landmark by any definition: a new translation and interpretation of the early writings of Champlain himself by Conrad Heidenreich and Janet Ritch. Scheduled for next year is another volume that will go far to satisfy the appetite for the 17th century: *The Writings of Pierre-Esprit Radisson* prepared by Germaine Warkentin. Returning to another road well travelled, two volumes of nineteenth-century interest are in preparation. Linda Sabathy-Judd's volume dealing with Moravian missions among the Inuit in Labrador is scheduled for 2012. It will be followed by *The Papers of William Ord Mackenzie: The Canadas during the 1830s*, edited by Sandra Alston and Cicely Blackstock.

Two upcoming volumes will take a different direction—both will be anchored in the twentieth-century ex-

perience of Canada. *John Holmes: A Canadian in Foreign Affairs*, edited by Hector McKenzie, will bring to light the life of an influential diplomat and scholar. Norman Hillmer is preparing a volume on Oscar D. Skelton, a scholar and public servant whose impact on the evolution of the public service in Canada has long been admired.

And we can promise much more! A volume is in the works on Russia and the North Pacific. The Society is also planning a documentary volume on the Halifax Explosion in 2017, on the occasion of the centenary of that dreadful event. It is being prepared by Shirley Tillotson, David Sutherland and Peter Twohig. These works will open new exploratory paths to the membership of the Society.

The Champlain Society has broadened the themes and subjects upon which it focuses its documentary collections but the basic interest remains: to make available to Canadians (and Canadaphiles) the key documents which mark and explain our distinct historical experience. The sheer volume of modern records, however, means this is a very considerable challenge. As always, choice is the key element. What authentic materials best reveal the record of the past?

Fortunately, we have an active and capable Council that has the academic expertise and practical experience to assess those questions. We have also put into place a rigorous academic assessment and review procedure to assure the highest objective scholarly analysis and standards for our work. Building and extending on the solid base established by our founders a century ago, we look forward to continued success.

-Roger Hall, General Editor

Translating Samuel de Champlain: An Interview with Janet Ritch

Later this year, The Champlain Society will publish *Samuel de Champlain: Des Sauvages and Other Documents Related to the Period before 1604*. It presents and interprets Champlain's first work *Des Sauvages: ou Voyage de Samuel Champlain, de Brouage, fait en la France nouvelle l'an mil six cens trois* ("*Des Sauvages: or Voyage of Samuel Champlain of Brouage, made in New France in the year 1603*"). This was an account of his first trip to North America.

The Society included *Des Sauvages* in its 1922 volume of the works of Samuel de Champlain. This new work provides a new translation and complete collation of the two original printings (1603 and 1604) of this work.

Patrice Dutil, Vice President of the Society, recently interviewed Janet Ritch, who edited this new volume with Conrad E. Heidenreich. Dr. Ritch, who trained at the Centre for Medieval Studies and now teaches French at the Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto, and history at York University, assumed the task of translation.

PD: What did Champlain have in mind when he wrote this book? What were his ambitions?

JR: Champlain's main objective in writing *Des Sauvages* was to draft the accountability report to King Henri IV upon his return to France from his first trip to the St-Lawrence. His actual report would likely have been delivered in oral form, but the complementary version of *Des Sauvages* which has come down to us must have been ready for publication at the same time. He judges the land and the peoples from the perspective of their suitability for French settlement, but even this may not represent his own personal ambition at this early stage. Contrary to popular belief, his principal objective was not trade, discovery of a passage to the orient or personal wealth. I think he was motivated,

above all, by intellectual curiosity in the New World.

PD: You undertook to write a new translation. What was wrong with the first edition?

JR: I have a great deal of respect for the first edition of *Des Sauvages* prepared by The Champlain Society for publication in 1922. The scholarship that went into that edition is still recognized across North America as first class. Nevertheless, a lot of research has been published since 1922 and this had an impact upon our interpretation of *Des Sauvages*. For one thing, early dictionaries reflecting how people in France at the time period defined their own terms are more accessible. The main weakness of the first attempt, however, was a propensity for projecting twentieth-century assumptions onto the text in translation. For example, the first CS translation converted *tête* to 'scalp'! Another example is *salubre* (salubrious) which was translated as 'brackish' (mainly the responsibility of Henry Biggar in this case) because the text seemed to suggest this meaning and because they assumed that Champlain was eager to reach the salt sea of the Pacific Ocean. Finally, they imagined that Champlain's language skills were so weak that he could confuse the *sal-* in *salubre* with *salée* (salted or salty). Finally, our attitudes to Canada's First Nations have changed dramatically since the early twentieth century. As you probably notice, we have avoided translating *Sauvages* as 'Savages' just because the term should not carry the pejorative resonance that it does today, when the early seventeenth-century usage was closer to the etymological origin of the word; i.e. 'people of the woods' from the Latin *silva* (woods).

PD: One of most memorable passages of *Des Sauvages* is

Champlain's vivid account of what he called the *tabagie* (feast) at Tadoussac. What did your treatment bring out?

JR: The two opening chapters, in which the *tabagies* celebrating the victory of the Montagnais and their



Dr. Janet Ritch

allies over the Iroquois are described, are my favourites too! Here the shock hits hardest when the allies begin "to dance by taking up the heads of their enemies, which were hanging behind them."

We have tried to highlight the fact that Champlain had just arrived in Canada for the first time, when he was already judging the Natives somewhat severely. He must have been repeating some standard prejudices from the other Frenchmen in New France, just as he accepted uncritically a few *fables* concerning the Almouchiquois and the Gougou at the end of *Des Sauvages*. Yet the exchange of creation myths and other legends between himself and Anadabijou, the *grand Sagamo* (great chief) of the Montagnais, already reveals an unusual tolerance in Champlain. At least, he was willing to listen.

PD: What kind of writer was Champlain? Did your impression of him change as you pursued your translation?

JR: It is clear that Champlain did not receive a classical education. Otherwise, most of his grammar is quite regular and compares favourably with that of his abridger, the writer and historian Pierre-Victor Cayet. Champlain's propensity for dropping subject pronouns sometimes caused ambiguities which were difficult to resolve.

PD: Champlain rushed the first version of *Des Sauvages* to print in 1603, and then a new version was printed in 1604. Did Champlain make a lot of changes in his second rendering?

JR: I do not believe that Champlain had anything to do with the second printing of *Des Sauvages*. The evidence suggests that the slim (80 pages) first book by an unknown author was more popular than anticipated! The printer made the decision to reprint it in response to the demand, but the whole book had to be reset by a compositor. Taking a sample of the first five folios (10

pages) of the journal, we find an average of 10 variants per page, but the majority are totally insignificant. The compositor was no more capable of reconstituting the original precisely than a medieval scribe of copying a manuscript exactly. Even the ten most substantial changes that we identified for the entire book are not really significant. Nevertheless, the complete collation of the two printings allows us to establish the first printing, undated but likely of 1603, as our base text. The recomposition in 1604 introduces slightly more errors than corrections.

PD: Were Champlain's later works of help to you in trying to decode what he meant in 1603?

JR: Champlain repeats whole chunks of his writings in subsequent journals. This habit proved helpful for translating chapter three, since Champlain's *Voyages* of 1613 repeats the generalized French perception of the Natives concerning their beliefs and practices, including shamans and snow-shoes. What begins in the context of Champlain's discussion with Anadabijou at the *tabagie* of 1603 is transposed to that

of the establishment of Quebec City in 1608, excluding the three Native legends that Anadabijou recounted to Champlain.

PD: Champlain spoke a French that is very different from what is spoken today either in Canada or in France. What made it special? What made it difficult to translate?

JR: Translation is never a question of simply substituting x in another language for x in English, except where simple equivalencies between such things as flora and fauna can be established (and even this is not simple, since a bird in Canada may resemble one that Champlain can identify in France, but not be the same bird! etc.).

In many cases, a word can carry a wide semantic range that resonates differently in various contexts. Consequently, the translator must have a good grasp of the culture and historical context informing the language. Even a deceptively simple verb like *être* (to be) was used to mean *aller* (to go) in the seventeenth century. This is what makes historical translation such a challenge.

Champlain Watch: Spring-Summer 1610

Champlain wintered in France in 1610 and returned to Canada at the end of May, finding that the Habitation in Quebec had survived the harsh weather relatively well. He had a busy diplomatic and military summer. He encountered the Montagnais at Tadoussac and Quebec, and met Hurons and Algonquins where the St. Lawrence and Richelieu rivers merge (now Sorel).

Rumours were rampant that the enemy Iroquois were nearby. The Algonquin rushed into battle and suffered casualties. Champlain and four others rushed behind, loaded with armour and

arquebuses. Champlain was soon injured by an arrow that "split the tip of my ear and entered my neck." He nevertheless fired a number of times until the Iroquois scattered or were taken prisoner for eventual torture (and well described by Champlain).

Champlain left for France again in August, but not before a final act of diplomacy. He agreed to place Etienne Brûlé, a young man barely out of his teens who had arrived in 1608, to winter with the Algonquin. Champlain returned to France with a young Huron named Saviignon.

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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:

- *Samuel de Champlain: Des Sauvages and Other Documents Related to the Period before 1604*. Edited by Conrad Heidenreich and Janet Ritch. 2010.
- *The Voyages of Pierre-Esprit Radisson*. Edited by Germaine Warkentin. 2011.
- *The Moravians in Labrador*. 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. 2014.
- *The Halifax Relief Commission: Rebuilding the 'Shattered City,' 1917-1921*. Edited by Paul Sutherland, Shirley Tillotson, and Peter Twohig.

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.



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