

Samuel de Champlain (1574-1635)



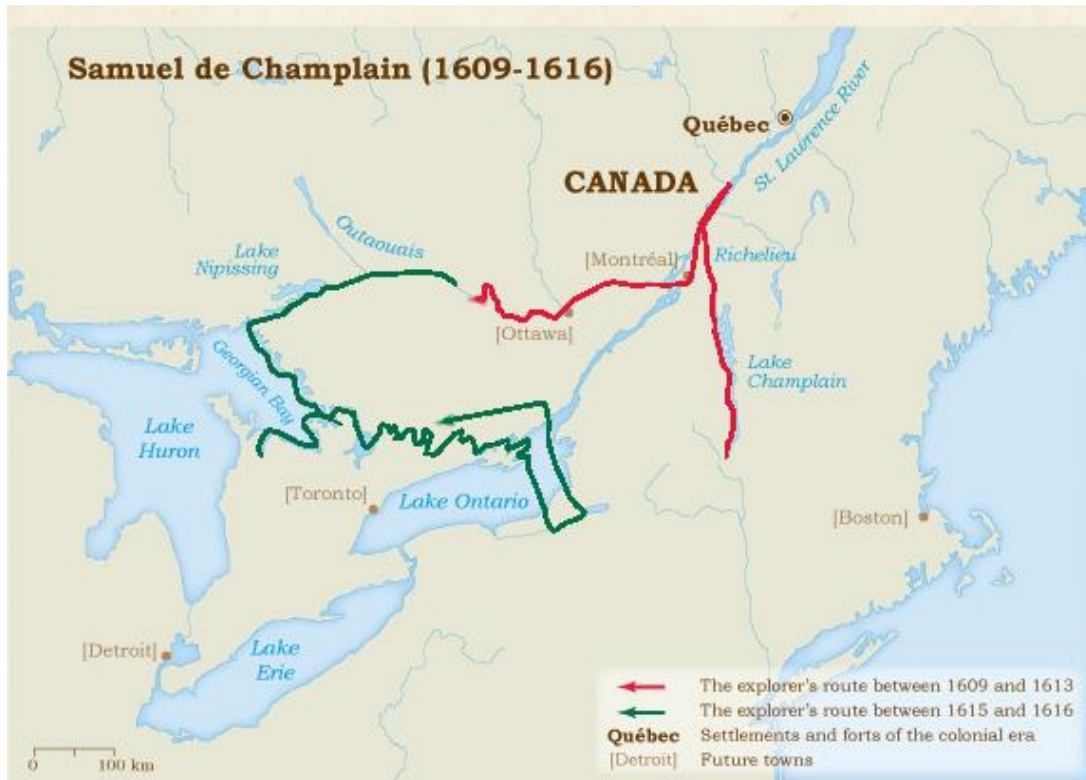
"The Father of New France", was a French navigator, cartographer, draftsman, soldier, explorer, geographer, ethnologist, diplomat, and chronicler. He founded New France and Quebec City on July 3, 1608. He is important to Canadian history because he made the first accurate map of the coast and he helped establish the settlements.

Born into a family of mariners (both his father and uncle-in-law were sailors, or navigators), Samuel Champlain learned to navigate, draw, make nautical charts, and write practical reports.

His education did not include Ancient Greek or Latin, so he did not read or learn from any ancient literature. As each French fleet had to assure its own defense at sea, Champlain sought to learn fighting with the firearms of his time: he acquired this practical knowledge when serving with the army of King Henry IV during the later stages of France's religious wars in Brittany from 1594 or 1595 to 1598, beginning as a quartermaster responsible for the feeding and care of horses. During this time he claimed to go on a "certain secret voyage" for the king, and saw combat at the end of 1594. By 1597 he was a captain in the French Army.

Champlain, while still a young man, began exploring North America in 1603 under the guidance of François Gravé Du Pont, his uncle. From 1604 to 1607 Champlain participated in the exploration and settlement of the first permanent European settlement north of Florida, Port Royal, Acadia (1605) as well as the first European settlement that would become Saint John, New Brunswick (1604). Then, in 1608, he established the French settlement that is now Quebec City.

Champlain was the first European to explore and describe the Great Lakes, and published maps of his journeys and accounts of what he learned from the natives and the French living among the Natives. He formed relationships with local Montagnais and Innu and later with others farther west (Ottawa River, Lake Nipissing, or Georgian Bay), with Algonquin and with Huron Wendat, and agreed to provide assistance in their wars against the Iroquois.



In 1620, Louis XIII of France ordered Champlain to cease exploration, return to Quebec, and devote himself to the administration of the country. In every way but formal title, Samuel de Champlain served as Governor of New France, a title that may have been formally unavailable to him owing to his non-noble status. He established trading companies that sent goods, primarily fur, to France, and oversaw the growth of New France in the St. Lawrence River valley until his death in 1635.

Champlain had a severe stroke in October 1635, and died on December 25, leaving no immediate heirs. Jesuit records state he died in the care of his friend and confessor Charles Lallemand.

He was temporarily buried in the church while a standalone chapel was built to hold his remains in the upper part of the city. Unfortunately, this small building, along many others, was destroyed by a large fire in 1640. Though immediately rebuilt, no traces of it exist anymore: his exact burial site is still unknown, despite much research since about 1850, including several archaeological digs in the city. There is general agreement that the previous Champlain chapel site, and the remains of Champlain, should be somewhere near the Notre-Dame de Québec Cathedral.

Champlain is memorialized as the "Father of New France" and "Father of Acadia", and many places, streets, and structures in northeastern North America bear his name, or have monuments established in his memory. The most notable of these is Lake Champlain, which straddles the border between northern New York and Vermont, extending slightly across the border into Canada. In 1609 he led an expedition up the Richelieu River and explored a long, narrow lake situated between the Green Mountains of present-day Vermont and the Adirondack Mountains of present-day New York; he named the lake after himself as the first European to map and describe it.