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First Contact

The Vikings

Tantalizing theories abound about the first European contact with North America - Phoenicians perhaps, or Carthaginians. There's even a fantastical tale about St. Brendan, an Irish monk who, according to folklore, celebrated mass on the back of a whale during his seven year voyage to the frigid, fearsome land across the ocean.

But in reality, the first documented contact between Europeans and North America was with the Norse in AD 1000, who met with either Dorset or Beothuk natives in Labrador.

The Vikings were marauders, feared and loathed in Europe before they sailed west -- first to Iceland, then Greenland. From there they went further still, reaching a small sheltered bay at the end of a great peninsula at the northern tip of what is now Newfoundland. There they built a wayfaring station and a repair depot for their ships. They constructed houses out of sod and used local iron deposits to make their repairs.

But the Vikings were reluctant to trade their weapons for the furs natives brought to them and their penchant for violence soon landed them in trouble with the local inhabitants. They called the natives Skraelings, after the trolls in Scandinavian myth.

The name means small and withered and the Vikings also described them as "ill-favoured men with ugly hair on their heads... they had big eyes and were broad in the cheeks. They hissed like geese."

The Vikings had encountered a small group of these people and then killed them. From that day the Viking settlement became a target and skirmishes between the two groups didn't abate until the Vikings finally left.

It would be five centuries before the next European visitor arrived with John Cabot landing in Newfoundland. There followed a steady stream of Basque, Spanish and Portuguese fishermen, French explorers and English colonists.

John Cabot

The first documented European to arrive in North America after the Norse was Giovanni Caboto. While argument still persists over his birthplace - Venice or Genoa - when he sailed for a British king, his name was anglicized to John Cabot.

King Henry VII of England authorized Cabot to "seek out, discover and find whatsoever isles, countries, regions or provinces of heathens and infidels... in what part of the world soever they be, which before this time have beene unknowen to all Christians."

England was attempting to keep up with the Spaniards who had sent their own expedition west under Christopher Columbus years earlier. Columbus' journey had been a probe to find a new route to the markets of the Orient but he got it wrong. He left Spain, boldly crossed the Atlantic and mistakenly declared that the islands he found there were the Atlantic shores of Asia: the West Indies.

"Signor Christopher Columbus of Genoa had discovered the coast of India and it was spoken of grandly... It was more divine than human to have found that way never before known, to get to the Orient, from where the spices originate."

It was 1492 and his discovery was received in Europe with fanfare, and envy. Not to be outdone by the Spanish, King Henry VII selected Caboto, who was living with his family in the English port of Bristol, to cross the Atlantic and plant a flag for England.

Cabot sailed from Bristol on May 2, 1497 on a single ship, christened the Matthew after his wife, Matea. Cabot set a more northerly route then Columbus, settling into higher Atlantic currents.

Four and a half weeks later he sighted land. On St. John's Day -- June 24, 1497 Cabot set into a bay and named the area 'Terra Nova' or "New Found Land."

The events of discovery were recorded by two foreign agents from England; Raimondo Soncino and Lorenzo Pasqualigo and by a Bristol merchant, John Day.

Day's letter, written in the winter of 1497-98, describes a single landing on the same day Cabot spotted land. When Cabot and a few men went ashore they raised a cross and the banner of England, claiming the territory for Christianity and for the King, Cabot's commercial backer.

Following a trail inland, Cabot and his men came to a clearing with a dead campfire and a short stick that had been carved and painted. The abandoned site may have belonged to the Beothuk and it was a fitting introduction to a tribe that would prove so elusive.

Cabot retrieved fresh water, then got nervous and returned to his ship, which he sailed along the coast for another month. Returning to the place where he made landfall, Cabot set out again for England on July 20, 1497. On August 6, 1497 the crowd at the docks back in Bristol received Cabot as a hero.

Not only had he claimed new land for England, but he had also found a seemingly bottomless supply of codfish, what the English called stockfish.

Cabot immediately reported his discoveries to the king, telling him that there were so many fish in the waters of the Atlantic that they could be caught with a basket lowered over the side of a boat. Henry VII duly rewarded Cabot for his successful voyage, congratulating the explorer with a cash bonus, an

annual pension, and royal permission to follow up with a larger expedition.

Cabot did set out on a follow-up voyage, leaving England with five ships in 1498, but he didn't make it back to his "New Found Land." All five ships and all hands aboard them were lost at sea.

Cartier and Donnacona

Cartier's First Voyage

After John Cabot's 1497 voyage to North America, it wasn't until 1534 and Jacques Cartier that a major expedition was sent out to the northern part of North America.

King Francis I of France commissioned the sailor, born in St. Malo, in Brittany on the French coast, to cross the Atlantic in search of riches and a route to China.

The King hoped Cartier would find a new passage to the Orient, by a route around or through the North American continent. If that proved unsuccessful, at least he might find gold, as the Spanish had in South America.

This official voyage may not have been Cartier's first excursion across the Atlantic -- it's possible that he had gone to Newfoundland as a sailor before his voyages of discovery. But on April 20th, 1534, Cartier left St. Malo on a sure course for Newfoundland.

Arriving on May 10, he passed through the fishing waters off its shores, then went north, through the Straits of Belle Isle. Cartier was in new territory now, searching for a waterway that he presumed would deliver him to Asia, but he could barely penetrate Northern America's eastern coast.

Cartier -- shown in profile in one portrait, as hawk-nosed, dressed as a nobleman, almost scowling -- had a poor opinion of the new land. "I am rather inclined to believe that this is the land God gave to Cain," Cartier wrote in his first, famous, impression of the country. He couldn't see a cartload of soil; it was a barren, unwelcoming place.

Cartier meticulously marked each new bay and promontory on his charts: Baie des Chasteaux, Ile de l'Assumption, Baie du St. Laurent. He also noted the native people he met at each new place.

"There are people on this coast, whose bodies are fairly well formed, but they are wild and savage folk," he wrote, possibly of the Micmac, who approached them to trade.

"As soon as they saw us they began... making signs... that they had come to barter with us... and held up some skins of small value, with which they clothe themselves."

"We likewise made signs to them that we wished them no harm," Cartier wrote in the ship's log, "and sent two men ashore, to offer them some knives and other iron goods, and a red cap to give to their chief... they bartered all they had to such an extent that all went back naked without anything on them; and they made signs to us that they would return on the morrow with more skins."

On one occasion when Cartier and some of his men were exploring the coast in only one of their longboats they sighted a flotilla of more than forty canoes. Several of them approached and surrounded the lone boat.

"All came after our longboat, dancing and showing many signs of joy, and of their desire to be friends," noted Cartier. Despite their intent, he was nervous of their numbers and motioned them to turn back. "And seeing that no matter how much we signed to them, they would not go back, we shot off over their heads two small cannon." The Micmacs turned and paddled away.

Search for a Route to the Orient

Trade and relations with the natives were of marginal interest to Cartier who was mostly focused on probing the coast for a passage to Asia. As they moved westward, Cartier was encouraged at least by the land, which was more fertile than Newfoundland, and by the abundance and exoticism of the wildlife.

They stopped at Îles aux Oiseaux and killed more than a thousand birds, many of them great auks, which were eventually hunted to extinction.

He explored the Strait of Belle Isle as a possible route to the Orient, but off Anticosti Island he was defeated by fog and had to turn back.

At the Baie de Gaspé, Cartier met the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, the group with whom he would have his most lasting relationship in the New World, one that would prove both beneficial and destructive to both parties. He gave them presents and was introduced to their chief, Donnacona. An alliance was quickly formed and sealed with dancing and celebrating.

As the summer was coming to an end, Cartier's expedition had yielded nothing other than some new maps and encounters with natives. He planned to convince his King to allow another expedition, to pick up where they left off.

Trying to impress Francis I, Cartier erected a thirty foot cross with a fleur-de-lys shield and a wooden board engraved with the words, "Vive le Roi de France". The French knelt and worshipped and looked to heaven. But the move, which had territorial overtones, was not welcomed by the Iroquoians.

"When we had returned to our ships," Cartier wrote, "the captain, [Donnacona], dressed in an old black bear-skin,

arrived in a canoe with three of his sons and his brother; but they did not come so close to the ships as they had usually done.

And pointing to the cross he made us a long harangue, making the sign of the cross with two of his fingers; and then he pointed to the land all around about, as if he wished to say that all this region belonged to him, and that we ought not to have set up this cross without his permission. And when he finished his harangue, we held up an axe to him, pretending we would barter it for his skin.

To this he nodded assent and little by little drew near the side of our vessel, thinking he would have the axe. But one of our men, who was in our dinghy, caught hold of his canoe, and at once two or three more stepped down into it and made them come on board our vessel, at which they were greatly astonished."

Cartier told Donnacona that he would go to France and return the next spring with more iron goods to trade. He wanted to take two of the chief's sons, Dom Agaya and Taignoagny, as a gesture of faith between the men.

"We dressed up his two sons in shirts and ribbons and in red caps, and put a little brass chain around the neck of each, at which they were greatly pleased."

Donnacona, having not much choice but to let his sons go, bid them farewell and Cartier left. He made a cursory search for a passage to the Orient then returned to France, arriving on September 5 with his two captives, an exotic anticlimax to his first voyage of discovery.

Dom Agaya and Taignoagny were Cartier's insurance, and they would guide him back, into the mouth of the river and beyond, he thought, to the Orient.

Cartier's Second Voyage

Jacques Cartier's first voyage was effectively a failure, but upon his return to France on September 5, 1534, he remained optimistic. With Dom Agaya and Taignoagny, Donconna's two sons as captives, he had evidence of the world overseas.

Their stories managed to convince François I that it was worthwhile to send Cartier back on another expedition to "Canada", the name the two Iroquoians gave to their father's village, and the name Cartier had added to his map.

Dom Agaya and Taignoagny found themselves immersed in the court of François I, at the height of the Renaissance, amidst Dukes and Duchesses, artists and scholars. Among them was prominent clergyman, André Thevet. He was a cosmosgrapher, responsible to the king for unraveling the mysteries of the world.

"The king was hoping that even though this country did not bring him much revenue, it would at least bring him immortal honour and the grace of God to have rescued this barbarous people from ignorance and to render it to the Christian church," Thevet wrote.

From his chambers in Paris, Thevet conjured a myth of a native North America that was godless yet surprisingly peaceful. In Domagaya and Taignoagny he saw a simple nobility, a people who lived a blissful existence and who could be easily conquered. "They have neither cities nor castles nor machines of war like us," he wrote.

And so, in May 1535, Cartier set off with three ships instead of two, and 110 men rather than the 61 of his first voyage. He was buoyed by his two guides' description of a river leading to their village of Stadacona and to Hochelaga, the Iroquoian settlement at the present site of Montreal.

The chief's sons described it as a lengthy route into the interior that no one had explored to the end. It sounded like the passage Cartier was seeking, but he didn't entirely trust the two men and he first checked the north shore to ascertain there wasn't a more promising route. He finally accepted their guidance, which led him to the St. Lawrence River, his most significant geographical discovery.

On September 7, 1535 Cartier reached the archipelago at Orléans, near Stadacona. Donnacona came out to the boat and embraced his sons and they spoke of France. Gifts were exchanged and the mood was festive but it was quickly replaced by a guarded suspicion on both sides.

"And all came over toward our ships," Cartier noted, "showing many signs of joy, except the two men we had brought with us, to wit, Taignoagny and Dom Agaya, who were altogether changed in their attitude and goodwill, and refused to come on board our ships, although many times begged to do so. At this time we began somewhat to distrust them."

The two sons presumably distrusted Cartier, having been kidnapped by him, but the mood of mutual suspicion was mitigated by the chance for mutual gain.

Cartier in Hochelaga

Donnacona's two sons learned to speak French over the several months they'd spent as Jacques Cartier's captives. Taignoagny and Dom Agoya acted as interpreters upon return to their father's village in the spring of 1535.

Cartier, however, suspected that Taignoagny wasn't in fact presenting his father's views, but his own, or that there was some treachery in the translation.

Taignoagny told Cartier that his father was vexed because the French were so heavily armed, while the natives were not. "The Captain replied that for all Donnacona's grief, he would not cease to carry them since such was the custom in France as Taignoagny well knew."

After promising to accompany Cartier up the St. Lawrence to Hochelaga, Taignoagny then refused, saying the river wasn't worth exploring. The French became convinced that Taignoagny "was a worthless fellow, who was intent on nothing but treason and malice."

As Cartier became more intent about going up the river to Hochelaga, Donnacona and his sons became more resistant to the idea. It's possible that they wanted a binding trade deal with Cartier before he dealt with other bands.

Donnacona may have wanted to control trade with the Europeans. Perhaps he simply resented the intrusion into the interior in so bold a manner. The two sons had spent a year in France and they might have glimpsed the imperial aims of Cartier's backer. They also glimpsed the power the church held for the French.

"On the next day," Cartier reported, "they devised a great ruse to prevent us still from going to Hochelaga. They dressed up three men as devils, arraying them in black and white dog-skins, with horns as long as one's arm and their faces coloured black as coal."

They passed by the ship in a canoe then returned to shore where Donnacona and his men grabbed them and carried them into the wood. Taignoagny and Dom Agaya emerged from the trees, feigning astonishment.

Taignoagny cried, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus," and stared toward heaven. Domagaya joined in, calling out, "Jesus, Maria, Jacques Cartier" and he too, looked upward.

A religious face-off ensued, with Donnacona's sons saying that their God, Cudouagny, had warned them that there would be enough snow and ice at Hochelaga to kill everyone. It was late September with no sign of winter and this prediction didn't carry much weight with the French.

Cartier responded that Cudouagny was a fool; Jesus would keep them safe. Despite that reassurance, Taignoagny and Dom Agaya said that Donnacona refused to let them them accompany Cartier to Hochelaga unless Cartier would leave behind a hostage. Cartier decided to move on without them.

Continuing alone was a risk for Cartier, as the seasons were turning, but he was sure to soon be arriving in the Orient, leaving the treacherous winter behind.

The Healing Man

Jacques Cartier's journey up the St. Lawrence had the breathless novelty of the New World. They saw beluga whales and walruses for the first time. Among the familiar sights - hazelnut trees, grapevines - there were new varieties of birds in huge numbers.

They were well received by natives along the way. On one occasion when they ran into five Iroquois hunters, Cartier wrote that they "came to meet our boats without fear or alarm, and in as familiar a manner as if they seen us all their lives. And when our longboats grounded, one of those men took me in his arms and carried me on shore as easily as if I had been a six-year-old child, so strong and big was that man."

The expedition of three ships landed at a large island in the river on October 2, 1535. Cartier went ashore and set out on foot.

"We marched on, and about half a league thence found the land began to be cultivated. It was fine land with large fields covered with the corn of the country... and in the middle of these fields is situated and stands the village of Hochelega, near and adjacent to a mountain, the slopes of which are fertile and are cultivated, and from the top of which one can see for a long distance. We named this mountain 'Mount Royal.'"

No other European had been this far into the continent before. Cartier arrived at the gates of Hochelega, then went inside, describing later what he found there.

"They have a plant, of which a large supply is collected in summer for the winter's consumption. They hold it in high esteem, though the men alone make use of it in the following manner...

"After drying it in the sun... they crumble this plant into powder, which they place in one of the openings of a hollow instrument. And laying a live coal on top, suck at the other end to such an extent that they fill their bodies so full of smoke that it streams out of their mouths and nostrils as from a chimney."

While Cartier was watching the Hochelgans, they were also regarding him with some awe, remarking at his beard and his European clothing: they had never seen a being anything like him before. More than 1,000 people came out to meet him and his crew. They exchanged gifts and the natives gave the Europeans fish and food in such quantity that "it seemed to rain bread." The men danced and there was much calling out.

"At once many sick persons, some blind, others with but one eye, others lame or impotent and others again so extremely old that their eyelids hung down to their cheeks, were brought in and set down or laid out near me, in order that I might lay my hands upon them, so that one would have thought Christ had come down to earth to heal them".

The Iroquois leader, Agouhanna, was partially paralyzed and was carried in on a large deerskin and presented to Cartier. "He showed his arms and legs to me motioning to be good enough to touch them, as if he thereby expected to be cured and healed. On this I set about rubbing his arms and legs with my hands."

Cartier, who wrote "I am more than ever of the opinion that these people would be easy to convert to our holy faith," addressed his impromptu assembly, reading the Gospel of St.

John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... "

He played the role of a healing man to find out how to continue on to the Orient. But his ruse could only last so long. He had to get moving or risk being frozen in until spring.

Finally Cartier was forced to make a run back to the Atlantic, but the ice caught his ships near Donnacona's stronghold at Stadacona and they were forced to winter there.

Winter and Disease at Stadacona

After spending some time with the natives at Hochelaga in the fall of 1535, Jacques Cartier returned to his ships, attempting to make it out before the winter, but the river had begun to freeze and they were forced to stay at Stadacona. His men who had not ventured to Hochelaga were already building a fort. The fortress, with artillery pointing outward, was an affront to Donnacona, and the relationship between Cartier and the chief quickly deteriorated. The natives ceased to bring fish to the fort, which they had done regularly, and contact withered.

Relations were effectively cut off by an outbreak of disease. By December, fifty natives were dead and Cartier forbade any contact, lest it spread to his own men. But the French quickly began to exhibit symptoms, and they assumed that they had caught whatever the natives had. It is likely that they were suffering from different maladies though. The Iroquois may have been hit by a viral infection borne by the French, where it seems clear that Cartier's men had scurvy.

"The sickness broke out among us accompanied by the... most extraordinary symptoms, for some lost all their strength, their legs became swollen and inflamed.

"And all had their mouths so tainted that the gums rotted away down to the roots of the teeth, which nearly fell out. The disease spread among the three ships to such an extent that in the middle of February, of the 110 men forming our company, there were not ten in good health."

By the end of March, twenty-five of the men were dead and almost all the survivors were afflicted, except Cartier, who, remarkably, was spared.

Cartier gave orders for the men to pray and had the figure of the Virgin Mary placed against a tree outside the fort. On Sunday, those who could move trudged across the snow and mass was held by the tree. They sang the seven psalms of David and prayed to the Virgin that her Son would have pity on them.

With his men enfeebled by scurvy, Cartier became even more nervous of Donnacona and his people. He worried they would attack if they knew of their vulnerability. Since relations were so strained, each camp was unaware of how fragile the other was. The French were too weak to bury their dead in the frozen ground and simply covered them with snow. When natives came near the fort, Cartier put on an elaborate charade, in an attempt to demonstrate their vigourous health. He took two or three men outside the enclosure, one of his men observed, and "would pretend to try to beat them, and vociferating and throwing sticks at them, would drive them back on board the ships, indicating to the savages by signs that he was making all his men work below the decks, some at caulking, others at baking bread and at other tasks; and that it would not do to have them come and loaf outside." Inside the boat the sick men weakly hammered the hull with sticks, trying to approximate the sounds of busy, healthy men.

When Donnacona's son Dom Agaya approached one day, Cartier saw he was in good health, and asked what had cured him. Dom Agaya said that he had been healed by the leaves of the white cedar tree. He had a drink prepared for Cartier's men. Initially, they declined to take it but a few of the more desperate finally drank it.

"As soon as they had drunk it they felt better," Cartier wrote, "which surely must be ascribed to miraculous causes; for after drinking it two or three times they recovered health and strength and were cured of all the diseases they had ever had... when this became known, there was such a press for the medicine that they almost killed each other to have it first; so that in less than eight days a whole tree as large and as tall as any I ever saw was used up, and produced such a result that had all the doctors of Louvain and Montpellier been there, with all the drugs of Alexandria, they could not have done so much in a year as did this tree in eight days." This miraculous cure was credited to God rather than the Iroquoians.

"At that time so many were down with the disease that we had almost lost hope of ever returning to France, when God in His infinite goodness and mercy had pity upon us," Cartier wrote.

Capture of Donnacona

By the time the ice loosened its grip on Jacques Cartier's ships at Stadacona in April 1536, he'd lost twenty-five men to scurvy and supplies were low. The river was finally open and they were free to go back to France, except for the dread that this second voyage, like the first, had ended in failure. Cartier still needed something to show to the king, in order to win yet another passage back to continue his conquest of Canada.

Cartier's chance could come again from Donnacona who told wild stories of riches to be discovered. "He assured us that he had been to the land of the Saguenay where there are immense quantities of gold, rubies, and other rich things, and that the men there are white as in France and go clothed in woollens," Cartier wrote. "He also told us that he had visited another region where the people, possessing no anus, never eat nor digest, but simply make water through the penis. He told us furthermore that he had been in the land of the Picquenyans, and to another country whose inhabitants have only one leg and other marvels too long to relate."

Whether Cartier believed this himself isn't clear. His relationship with Donnacona was based on mutual distrust,

and the stories of people who never ate would have strained his credulity. Nevertheless, Donnacona was a king and he had a good story. (French satirist François Rabelais incorporated the stories, and Donnacona himself, into his book Gargantua and Pantagruel). Cartier decided on another kidnapping, one more ambitious than the capture of the chief's sons the year before. "I had quite made up my mind to take Donnacona to France, that he might relate and tell to the king all he had seen in the west of the wonders of the world."

It was May 1536 and Cartier had a plan. He extended an invitation to Donnacona and his sons for the feast of the Holy Cross. But the chief and his sons were wary of going too near the ships; they knew that Cartier was preparing to leave and they had been duped before. After assuring the chief that the King of France didn't want any native hostages, Cartier took Donnacona and his sons by force, transporting them to the ship and holding them there.

The villagers spent the night on shore, "howling and crying like wolves all night long, calling out incessantly, Agouhanna, Agouhanna, in the hope of being able to speak to him." But Cartier kept Donnacona below decks. The next day, Cartier told Donnacona that he had arranged an interview with the French king, and that Donnacona would receive gifts in France and would return to his people in ten to twelve months. Donnacona related this to his people from the deck and said goodbye. They sailed on May 6.

Cartier took ten natives back with him: Donnacona, his two sons, three other men who had been captured with their chief and four children who had been offered as presents. André Thevet, a Franciscan who was a friend of Cartier's, recorded that they were baptized, and according to an observer, "instructed in the love and fear of God and of His holy law."

Donnacona met with King Francis and described the great land of the Saguenay, where he said white men lived, and nutmeg, cloves and pepper grew. A man named Lagarto was present for this speech and described it in a letter to John the Third, the King of Portugal. Lagarto said that Donnacona was like the Devil tempting Christ, saying "'haec omnia tibi dabo,' (all this I give to you) so as to return to his own land, and it seems to me that this is what will happen. The King laughed and said that the Indian King was an honest man, and would not act other than he had said."

It would seem impossible that Donnacona had been to a land where spices grew and Europeans lived. And it is unlikely that Cartier, who had spent a winter along the St. Lawrence, and knew the Saguenay to be north of this frozen expanse, believed the city to exist, or at least in the way Donnacona described it. Yet they were allied in this fiction; both wanted to return to Canada and each needed the other to do so.

Death of Donnacona

Donnacona, chief of the Stadacona Indians never returned to Canada after Jacques Cartier took him as a captive to France in 1536. The chief spent his time in Europe vainly trying to get home -- spinning tales of a land of riches called the Saguenay that lay beyond towering waterfalls. He promised to lead Cartier to these riches, if only he could get back there. But despite audiences with King Francis I and many noblemen, Donnacona would not get the chance to go back to those riches, if they existed.

André Thevet, a prominent clergy member responsible to the king, met Donnacona on several occasions and provides one of the few glimpses into his last years in France. He was "chief over all others, who was called [Donnacona], who died in France in the time of the great King François, who spoke our language very well and having lived there four or five years died a good Christian. I saw and spoke with him to be more certain of the singularities of his country, and he told me that his seniors had told him that when a man... came to earth the sky formed a new star... which appeared in the sky to be the guide of this man. Whereas on the contrary when a man... came to pass away and leave Canada, then a star was lost in the sky never to be seen again."

Cartier did return to Canada, however, in the spring of 1541 where he announced the death of Donnacona to the new chief of the Stadacona Indians.

Cartier's Third Voyage

In October 1540, Jacques Cartier received a commission for a third voyage, one which he hoped would establish a permanent settlement in Canada. His mandate was to go to "Canada and Hochelaga and as far as the land of Saguenay" with people of diverse skills, including fifty prisoners to be used as indentured labour. But before he could depart, the commission was annulled by the King and a new commission was issued to a Protestant, Jean-François de la Rocque de Roberval, who was to lead the voyage of colonization. Cartier was to accompany him in a subordinate position, but would depart alone as Roberval stayed behind waiting for artillery.

In May 1541, Cartier left for Canada with five ships, 1,500 men and the approval of the Vatican. The Sublimus Dei, issued by Pope Paul III in 1537, stated that the natives of the New World could be considered human beings and were therefore capable of being converted to the Catholic faith.

"To all faithful Christians to whom this writing may come, health in Christ our Lord and the apostolic benediction. The enemy of the human race... inspired his satellites who, to please him, have not hesitated to publish abroad that the Indians of the West and the South and other people of whom We have recent knowledge should be treated as dumb brutes created for our service, pretending that they are incapable of receiving the Catholic faith.

"We, who, though unworthy, exercise on earth the power of the Lord and seek with all our might to bring those sheep of His flock who are outside into the fold committed to our charge, consider, however, that the Indians are truly men and that they are not only capable of understanding the Catholic

Faith but, according to our information, they desire exceedingly to receive it."

In Canada it turns out this wasn't exactly true. While natives had shown some desire to receive the Faith, it wasn't clear that they understood what it was they were receiving.

None of the ten natives Cartier had brought to France in 1536 were on board when he returned. They had all died, with the exception of a young girl who they left in France. Cartier was questioned on the captives whereabouts when he arrived at Stadacona and was greeted by the new king, Agona.

"And after the said Agona had inquired of me where Donnacona and the rest were," Cartier wrote, "I answered him, That Donnacona was dead in France, and that his body rested in the earth, and that the rest stayed there as great Lords, and were married, and would not return back into their Country: the said Agona made no show of anger at all these speeches: and I think he took it so well because he remained Lord and Governor of the country by the death of the said Donnacona."

Agona may not have believed Cartier's explanation because hostility quickly developed between the two camps. Cartier established a new settlement at the mouth of the Rivière du Cap-Rouge and during the winter the natives kept the fort under siege with attack after attack. They said they had killed thirty-five men.

By spring Cartier's dreams of a new settlement were destroyed. In June, he set out to France, running into Roberval, his putative superior, at St. John's harbour. Roberval ordered Cartier to return to Canada. Cartier agreed but in the middle of the night, he sailed for France, taking with him some shimmering stones from along the riverbanks. He believed that he was carrying riches that would impress his king, but the diamonds he had found turned out to be quartz and the "certain leaves of fine gold" were iron pyrite -- fool's gold. Cartier was never given another commission and seems to have spent his time tending to his estate in St. Malo. He died on September 1, 1557 at the age of sixty-six.

Champlain's Gamble

Reconquering New France

Nearly sixty years had passed since Jacques Cartier, a French mariner, came to New France under the orders of the King of France, François I. Meanwhile, on March 22, 1594, a new king, Henri IV ascended the throne. France was plunged at that time into the economic doldrums and the state of finances was deplorable. Even the king was poor.

"My shirts are all torn, my doublet has gone through at the elbow," wrote Henri IV, "and my soup-pot is often upside down. For the last ten days I have been dining hither and thither."

France was a predominantly Catholic country and in order to rule it more easily, Henri IV converted to Catholicism. The Catholic Church owned a quarter of the land in France and had an income of one hundred million livres. Henri IV received absolution from the Pope, thus he was no longer excommunicated. He set about rebuilding his kingdom by surrounding himself with upright and devout Protestants.

To help restore France's economy, Henri IV adjusted taxes and encouraged agriculture. Henri IV also encouraged the manufacture of luxury goods: gold and silver fabrics, tapestries, crystal, as well as peltry.

Interest in New France was rekindled: some hoped it would be the Peru of France. The Duc de Sully, Surintendant Général of finance, was opposed to the reprisal of explorations because the believed that France's economic situation could be solved by ploughing and pasturage, France's lifeblood. His opinion was that those faraway lands "will only ever be a burden and of little use."

Henri ignored Sully's advice and allowed the French to embark on new expeditions to New France, in the hope of appropriating its treasure of furs. Wisely, Henri decided to found a company for the colonization, as the English and Dutch had done, instead of risking public finances in the enterprise.

In 1603, the "Canada and Acadia Company" – it took its name from an odd juxtaposition of an native word and one from Greek mythology – was given the monopoly over the fur trade in the territory ranging from present-day Philadelphia all the way to Cape Breton. Henri appointed one of his most loyal supporters Vice-Admiral of France: Aymar de Clermont de Chaste.

The Company's leading shareholders were mostly burghers from Dieppe and St. Malo who dreamed of dramatic profits of 72% like the ones that had been paid out in 1602, by the Dutch East India Company. The investors were prepared to finance the colony that the Crown demanded in exchange for a commercial monopoly. The fact that 70 per cent of the members of some expeditions died during the first winter did not faze the investors. At the time, a human life was often worth less than a beaver skin.

In the same year that he appointed Vice-Admiral of France, Aymar de Clermont de Chaste died. Who would replace him?

A new person was appearing on the scene in the history of Canada who would leave his mark. His name was Samuel de Champlain.

Acadian beginnings: Port Royal

The man who headed the Canada and Acadia Company, Aymar de Clermont de Chaste, Vice-Admiral of France, died in 1603, the same year that he was appointed.

Before he died, he made sure to send Samuel de Champlain to New France.

The founding father of New France might have been a Protestant himself, as his biblical first name seems to suggest and his long years of service in Henri IV's army. Aboard a Spanish vessel, Champlain had already explored the eastern coast of South America.

During his first voyage to Canada, he navigated the St. Lawrence River as far as Tadoussac, then all the way to the Lachine Rapids.

Upon his return to France, he discovered that his friend, Pierre du Gua de Monts, had taken over the trade monopoly and the two men prepared to return to North America the following spring.

In 1604, Champlain and de Monts set out for Acadia, the name given by the French to the region that roughly corresponds to today's Maritime provinces. They planned to establish a permanent trading post there. A Catholic priest accompanied them, but de Monts himself served as Huguenot pastor. Quarrels broke out on board between the two denominations. This legacy of the Wars of Religion had not been forgotten and mistrust would continue to create divisions among the French.

They decided to spend the winter on the island of Ste. Croix, but the decimation of a great number of the men by an outbreak of scurvy and fierce winds, prompted the colonists to seek a milder climate in the south. They followed the Atlantic coast southwards down to the port of Nausset, present day Cape Cod, not very far from the mouth of the Hudson.

Various attempts to disembark led to violent attacks by natives. On the beach, the French were riddled with wounds by an assault of arrows. The crew buried their dead in graves marked with wooden crosses, then got back on the ship. The natives came out of the forest, dug up the dead and threw the crosses into the sea.

De Monts and Champlain returned to the Bay of Fundy, where they built a new settlement: Port-Royal. De Monts then went back to France to reassure his partners, who blamed him for investing too heavily in settlements to the detriment of the fur trade.

Champlain sought ways to offset the effects of winter depression among his men and so created the Order of Good Cheer. They organized banquets with hunting spoils and staged a play called *The Theatre of Neptune in New France*, by Marc Lescarbot. The writer Lescarbot, who sojourned with Champlain, became in 1609 the first historian of Canada with his book *A History of New France*.

The settlement seemed to augur well. In 1606, de Monts managed to send reinforcements, which he placed under the command of one of his old comrades-in-arms in the Huguenot army, Baron Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt. But in France, de Monts lost his battle with the creditors, who put the company into receivership and struck down the monopoly. The majority of the colonists, including Champlain himself, returned to France.

De Poutrincourt stayed on, acquiring the title of Governor of Acadia. By assuring the continuous occupation of the colony, he made Port Royal the first permanent French settlement in Canada.

Champlain's return to Tadoussac

The settlement of Port Royal, founded by Samuel de Champlain and his partner Pierre du Gua de Monts, of the Canada and Acadia Company, did not give them control over the fur trade in the interior of the continent.

They would have to continue their exploration and find a suitable site for the establishment of another permanent settlement in the interior of the country.

The Basque, Spanish, English, Dutch and Portuguese had had a presence in Tadoussac for a long time and the natives preferred to go to the trading post on the river rather than the one on the Atlantic coast. Through the creation of a permanent colony, once the snow melted the new company would have a huge trading advantage over its rivals obliged to make the journey from Europe.

Back in France, the Huguenot Pierre de Monts, managed to find backers for a second expedition. This time he gave Champlain the powers of Lieutenant General of New France and gave him the responsibility of picking the exact location of the future colony. He thought it should be in the interior of the country, at the heart of the native trading networks.

In the spring of 1608, two vessels crossed the Atlantic, the *Lévrier*, under the command of Dupont-Gravé, and the *Don de Dieu*, under the command of Champlain.

On June 3, when Champlain arrived in Tadoussac, Dupont-Gravé's pilot came to greet him in a rowboat. The pilot informed him that Dupont-Gravé had tried to impose his monopoly on the Basque and Spanish captains who were already there, but they had answered him with their muskets and cannons. He took Champlain to the bedside of Dupont-Gravé, who was still alive but seriously wounded. Together, they negotiated a truce with Darache, the leader of the Spaniards, which allowed Dupont-Gravé's men to start trading with the Montagnais.

The Montagnais Indians were a nomadic people who hunted on an immense territory bounded in the North from the shores of the St-Lawrence River to James Bay. By trading with the Europeans, the Montagnais were assured of a steady supply of flour, which protected them from famine that had decimated them in the past.

The birth of Quebec

In order to succeed in competing for trade with the Basques, Spanish, English, Dutch and Portuguese based in Tadoussac, Samuel de Champlain proposed a daring plan to his investors: he wanted to establish a permanent trading post upstream from Tadoussac and to spend the winter there.

Thus, when the snow thawed, he would be ahead of the competition and he could trade on his own with the natives first.

In July 1608, Champlain continued his journey in a light and manoeuvrable craft designed for river travel. He passed Île aux Coudres, Rivière du Gouffre, and Cap Tourmente, which had all been named by Jacques Cartier. Champlain described the coast as a "mountainous and very dreary land." But he was delighted with the Île d'Orléans, which marked, in his words, "the beginning of the lovely and fine land of the great river."

From there, he looked for a site worthy of the settlement he wanted to create, and finally on July 8, he found it. It was an incredibly beautiful site, with its headland sparkling so brightly in the strong sunlight that Jacques Cartier had named it "Cap Diamant", believing that it was studded with precious stones.

Champlain, both a mapmaker and soldier, was above all struck by the strategic advantages of the site. The cliffs rose ninety-eight metres above sea level and he also noted that, at this point, the St. Lawrence was only one kilometre wide.

A battery of cannons could cut off an invader's access to the hinterland and its inexhaustible riches. Champlain decided to call his colony by its Algonkin name, Quebec, which means "the place where the river narrows."

"I looked for a good spot for our settlement. I could not find any place more convenient or better situated than the point of Quebec, so called by the natives, which was covered with nut-trees.

The plot against Champlain

Not long after the arrival of Samuel de Champlain and his men in Quebec, in July of 1608, the plan to establish a permanent trading post there was threatened. Champlain was tending his garden when a sailor came up to him, asking to speak in private.

The sailor said that the locksmith Antoine Natel, along with four others, had been hired by the Basques and Spaniards to murder Champlain. The sailor added that enemies would land as soon as they had heard that their conspiracy had been successful.

When Champlain summoned Natel, he shook with fear and immediately denounced his accomplices and their leader, Jean Duval, the second locksmith of the settlement.

Champlain invited the conspirators to come at sundown, to have some wine. They had barely had time to uncork the wine when they were arrested and thrown into prison.

Champlain promised to pardon them if they confessed. But after they wrote and signed statements, he had them clapped in irons. After a perfunctory trial, Duval was condemned to death, and Champlain sent the three others back to France, recommending they be sent to the gallows.

"To set an example...Jean Duval was hanged, and strangled. His head placed on the end of a stake to be exhibited in the most prominent part of our fort...to set an example for those remaining, that they wisely fulfill their duty in the future, and that the Basques and Spaniards of whom there were many thereabouts could not repossess it."

Champlain also calculated the effect of the sinister scarecrow on another group, the natives who lived around the settlement. For the Huron and Montagnais who were already trading furs with the French in Tadoussac, the message was clear: Champlain meant business as far as his enemies were concerned. They needed a valuable ally like him in their ongoing war against the formidable Iroquois.

The winter of 1608-1609

In 1608, with the settlement of Quebec completed, Samuel de Champlain sent his labourers back to France, keeping only 27 men with him.

Gradually, winter set in. Champlain had already endured three winters in Acadia, and he relied on his experience.

"The cold weather was more extreme than in France...and lasted much longer ...It is impossible to know that country without having wintered there. There are six months of winter in that country..."

Champlain knew what to expect once the snow started falling. He reassured himself by noting that he had taken all the precautions: "All those who were with me were well-clothed, sleeping in good beds, well-heated and nourished." Winter set in, and in February 1609, Champlain's men began to die of dysentery and scurvy.

"Scurvy attacks those who take proper care of themselves as well as the most miserable people. Eighteen got it and ten died from it." Scurvy, also called the distemper of the land, is caused by a deficiency of vitamin C.

There is no doubt that Champlain regretted that Cartier had not thought to pass on, in his journal, the remedy obtained from the natives – an herbal tea made from the foliage of white cedar called annedda, without which all the French explorers would have all died in 1535.

Champlain's carefully laid out plan was turning into a disaster. One of his men, Jean Godet du Parc was dying and Champlain

himself began to show symptoms of scurvy. The threat of scurvy would only disappear once the French explorers learnt from the natives how to hunt in the winter thus adding fresh game to their diet.

After months of suffering, agony, and death, spring brought deliverance. The snow and ice melted and the country came back to life.

"It is strange to contemplate that two to three yards' depth of snow and ice on the river can melt in less than 12 days. "On April 8, the air was still fairly cold. Some of those suffering [from scurvy] have recovered. On June 5, a boat arrived in our settlement bringing me much joy and comfort. Only eight of the original twenty-eight inhabitants remained alive, and even then, half of us were very weak."

Scrawny and filthy, the survivors looked more like the vanquished than conquistadors.

Alliance with Chiefs Anadabidjou and Yroquet

Samuel de Champlain did not realize it but he had established a trading post in Quebec at the heart of dangerous territory. The Montagnais and Algonkins had been trading with France for ten years. They were allied to the powerful Huron nation of the Great Lakes. Together, they controlled an immense area to the north of the St. Lawrence.

For a long time the Huron had been enemies of the Iroquois, a confederation of five nations who occupied territory south of the Great Lakes. Up until then, they were not part of the fur trade with the Europeans.

Samuel de Champlain now had to convince the natives to bring their fur to Quebec instead of Tadoussac, where they would trade the Spanish, Basques, English and Portuguese.

He promised military support to two chiefs: Anadabidjou and the Algonkin Yroquet.

The Algonkins lived in the Ottawa valley and north of Lake Huron, and aspired, much as the Montagnais did, for their cultures and languages were similar, to become suppliers of fur to the French.

"I promised to help them in their wars, as much to force them to love us as to assist me in my undertakings and discoveries, which could not succeed without their help." Champlain wrote.

Champlain was in a different situation to the Spanish who faced a united empire in Mexico. He found himself up against a multitude of federations and alliances; such as those of the Iroquois and the Huron; no single group wielded centralized power. He learned the first rule of trading with the Indians: if one becomes a friend with one of them, one becomes an enemy of their enemies.

Battle of Ticonderoga

In the spring of 1609, the chiefs Anadabidjou and Yroquet introduced Champlain to a Huron chief who also wanted to wage war on the Iroquois. Together, they prepared an expedition.

Champlain headed out on the warpath with 300 Indians and 9 Frenchmen. He finally had the opportunity to explore new territories. He would become the first European to thrust so far into the interior of the continent, to navigate the Richelieu River as far as a lake that he found so magnificent, he named it after himself.

A Huron told him that to the south of this lake, there was another, and then a river that went all the way to Florida. A year later, Champlain would realize that this river was the Hudson, but that it didn't go to Florida, it led to New York.

As the expedition continued southwards, fear of the Iroquois set in. After a few days, most of Champlain's party returned home. Only a handful agreed to penetrate deeper into enemy territory. Champlain would have to face the Iroquois with only sixty Indians and two French at his side.

They finally encountered the enemy at Ticonderoga Point, between the Green Mountains and the Adirondacks. The warriors in both camps spent the evening preparing for battle. "The whole night," Champlain wrote, "was spent in dancing and singing, in both camps, with many insults being proffered. Our men told the Iroquois they would see a kind of warfare they had never seen before."

The attack was at dawn. Two hundred Iroquois advanced. In front of them were 60 warriors armed with bows and arrows. Champlain stood behind them with his "arquebus," an early kind of firearm. His two French companions were in the woods, feverishly waiting for his signal. The strategy was simple.

"Our men told me that the men with big head-dresses were the chiefs and there were only three of them. We recognized them by their feathers that were much larger than those of their companions. They told me to do what I could in order to kill them."

The ranks suddenly opened up and encouraged by the yells of his allies, Champlain moved to the forefront, his armour shining in the sunlight. "I aimed straight at one of the three chiefs and with a single shot two of them dropped to the ground. I had put four bullets in my arquebus. The Iroquois were very astonished that two men could be slain even though they wore armour made of cotton thread and wood, able to withstand their own arrows. A great panic came over them. As I was reloading, one of my companions fired a shot that so startled them that seeing their chiefs dead before them, they lost courage and fled into the depths of the woods."

The alliance was sealed in blood. This victory, and a similar one the following year, added considerably to Champlain's prestige among the Algonkins, Montagnais and Hurons, who saw him as a great warrior and a man of his word. "We parted, making fine declarations of friendship," Champlain wrote. "They asked me if I didn't wish to come to their country, and to always help them as their brother. I promised to do so."

The three gunshots fired by the French set off a chain of hostilities that were to prove almost fatal for New France.

Arms trading

Thanks to Samuel de Champlain, the Montagnais and the Algonkins triumphed over the Iroquois at The battle of Ticonderoga in 1609. After this defeat the Iroquois understood that they needed European weapons.

Dutch merchants, who were using the Hudson River more and more as a means to penetrate the interior of the North American continent, agreed to sell them guns.

Fifteen years later, the Dutch settled in Fort Orange, later to be known as Albany, which was situated very close to the Mohawk River in the heart of Iroquois territory. The new colonists sought neither to convert the natives nor to explore new countries: they only wanted to get rich quickly.

The pastor Johannes Megapolensis was one of the few religious leaders from the Netherlands who tried to bring Christianity to the Mohawks. Six years of effort produced pitiful results. "When I pray, they laugh at me," he wrote in his journal. Although the Iroquois did not care for the theology of their neighbours, they did have the greatest respect for their abilities as gunsmiths.

The Huron, on the contrary, struggled with the governors of Quebec whose policy it was to arm only the converted. In the summer of 1609, they believed that the mere presence of the armed French at their side would guarantee them victory in war.

Huronia

Converting the natives in Huronia

In 1615, Samuel de Champlain went himself to Huronia. He found a far more complex society than he had imagined.

"In this stretch of land there are eighteen villages," he wrote. "They have a total of 30,000 souls. Their cabins are covered with the bark of trees, and a space at one end where they keep their corn. In one cabin, there is place for twelve fires and twenty-four families. The men go out to other nations to trade and to barter what they have for what they lack."

Champlain's trading empire spread into the heart of the continent and the Hurons grew rich and imposed their power. Paul Le Jeune, a Jesuit, related the words of a Montagnais:

"The beaver does everything perfectly well. It brings us kettles, hatchets, swords, knives; in short, the beaver makes everything"

Soon France insisted that Champlain send out missionaries in order to convert the natives to Catholicism. Three Recollet friars were brought over in 1615. One of them, Gabriel Sagard, was astonished by what he saw:

"The boys and young men of Canada and those particularly from the land of the Huron, have always had the capability of turning to evil as soon as they could, and the young women to prostitution as soon as they were able to; even mothers and fathers often act as pimps to their own daughters. One can attribute this partly to their nudity. and partly to the lack of spices and wine, and another part to their use of tobacco, the smoke of which stupefies them and goes straight to the brain."

Champlain did not foresee that his traders and missionaries would not get on well together. Gabriel Sagard explained:

"The greatest hindrance came to us from the French... Most of them did not wish us to convert the Savages. They were fearful that the beaver trade would fall off; that was the only purpose of their voyage. O my God, my blood freezes in my veins, at the realization that for them, a beaver skin was more important than the salvation of a people."

They faced a difficult task. The Huron resisted conversion, since they had their own god.

"It is the belief of the Hurons," explained the Recollet friar Gabriel Sagard, "that the Creator is named Yoscaha, and has a grandmother named Ataensiq. That he sows wheat, works, drinks, eats, and sleeps like other men. That all the animals of the world belong to him. That he is of a very good nature and everything that he does is well done. They also believe that certain spirits dominate all rivers, voyages, trading, wars, celebrations and maladies. They believe that souls are immortal and, on departing the body, go to dance and rejoice."

The Society of Jesus, the Jesuits

In 1615, France insisted that Champlain send missionaries to New France in order to convert the natives. The Recollet friars were the first to arrive.

Fifteen years later, the missionaries of the Society of Jesus arrived, also known as the Jesuits and the "soldiers of Christ". They had had great success in converting pagans in Asia, Africa, and South America. The Society of Jesus now faced a fresh challenge: converting thirty thousand natives in Huronia.

Paul Le Jeune admitted that that he did not know what the land of the Huron was like but declared that he would rather

go among them than reach earthly paradise. The danger seemed to fascinate him and his fellow missionaries: "It would never do," he wrote, "for everyone to know how fine life is in the horrors of these forests, in the compelling darkness of such barbarity. Otherwise, we would simply have too many people trying to come here."

The first to arrive, Paul Le Jeune, Charles Lalemant and Jean de Brébeuf, were not welcomed by the Huron. "The Huron would have preferred well-armed Frenchmen to these men in long robes who had no arquebuses," Le Jeune wrote. They only wanted to take three of us: two young Frenchmen and one priest. The missionaries promised that they would paddle and offered presents. They insisted as much as they could, but the Huron were not interested in salvation."

Jean de Brébeuf wrote: "The fathers that God will call to the holy mission of the Huron have to foresee the work, suffering and perils that must be incurred to them...for coming from a civilized place...you fall into the hands of barbarians, who do not care for your philosophy nor for your theology... that they absolutely despise you."

However, despite the attitude of the Huron, a considerable number of Jesuits settled in Huronia. Life among the Huron was not easy for the missionaries. A Jesuit recounted what he saw:

"They lack tables and household utensils, we eat on the ground... We have neither salt nor oil nor fruit nor bread nor wine, except the wine that is kept for mass. Our beds are made of a piece of tree bark on which a cover is laid out. We won't even talk about the sheets. These people have neither towers, nor cities, nor temples, nor masters of any science or art. They know neither reading nor writing. Smoke fills up the dwelling and spoils everything that we want to keep there. When night falls there is no other light other than the fire in the cabin, which we use to recite our breviary."

The Jesuits had little success in their evangelization. A shaman engaged them in theological argument, claiming that the Christian God did not live in Canada, and that was why he did not believe in Him. He maintained that native souls might not have been made the same as European ones, that they did not go to the same place after death. Besides, he concluded, who had ever returned from that land beyond death to describe it?

But the missionaries persisted, insisted and sometimes succeeded. Each soul converted was duly accounted for and faithfully reported to their superior. In Quebec, the superior of the Jesuits kept a diary of what life was like in Huronia. He transformed difficulties into success and the diary was finally published as: *Relations of the most remarkable events that have occurred during the mission of the Fathers of the Company of Jesus in New France*. Translated into Latin, Italian, and German, the *Relations* were devoured by a passionately devout readership in Europe.

"...one wrote to me on a piece of tree-bark, recounted a Jesuit, "that the demons in Huronia were furious, and strongly opposed to our plans. Turning that thought around in my head, I found myself astonished by the greatness of God for the more bloody the battle, the more noble the victory and the more glorious the triumph".

Paul Le Jeune bore witness to this:

"I learnt with my eyes and eyes that France was on fire for us and the land of savages was only ice.
I understood on one hand that the great of the land would give us their hearts for heaven and that the little people of this world, that is what I call those who do not believe in God, would be horrified by us."

In France, these writings sparked an insatiable apostolic zeal for the "Savages" of Canada.

The Jesuits built missions on Huron territory and the most significant was Saint Mary. They brought with them French youths as servants. Amongst them was Charles Lemoyne, 16, and Pierre Boucher who was only 15. The discovered a new world. Pierre Boucher recounted:

"Usually all the savages are well-meaning...They believe in the immortality of the soul and ...that after death, it goes to a beautiful place...They have a number of fables that they tell...They know Gods, they have a great aversion to sorcerers. They are very superstitious, and add faith to their thoughts: this is what gives the most pain to the Jesuit fathers who instruct them."

Epidemics

White man had been in Huronia for thirty years now. Contact with the Europeans was fatal for the Hurons. Alcohol wreaked havoc, epidemics lay in wait for them and soon they would also be victim to the Iroquois attacks. Pierre Boucher, a French youth brought to Huronia by the Jesuits recounted what he saw:

"All of the savages who are close to Europeans become drunkards; and this causes great harm to our people; for many who were good Christians have recanted. The Jesuit fathers have done everything they can to prevent this evil, for the Savages only drink to become drunk."

Between 1610 and 1640, half the Huron population of Georgian Bay died of influenza, measles, and smallpox. The Huron had no immunity to European diseases.

The shamans, the native priests, sought to preserve ancestral customs and accused the missionaries of poisoning them. They were also wary of the French merchants who forced the Huron to break their pact with the animal kingdom, by hunting out of season and relentlessly.

An old Huron woman confided in Marie de l'Incarnation, who had founded the Ursuline convent in Quebec in 1641 for the education of young French women and natives:

"The black robes are casting spells on us and making us die. They came into a village where everyone was doing just fine: as soon as they arrived, everyone died. They went to visit some cabins in other settlements, and it is only the places where they never set foot that have been spared death and illness. Unless they are quickly put to death, they will end up devastating the country, so that neither young nor old will live there any longer."

The Huron held the Jesuits responsible for what was happening to them. They rejected the Catholic faith. A Huron stated: "Never will I permit that my wife be baptised. I detest the faith, and I curse the God of the believers."

The Hurons were very ill-tempered with the Jesuit fathers. Father Jean de Brebeuf stated:

"The stones have come flying over our heads, the crosses have been pulled down and uprooted, hatchets and firebrands lifted against us, blows given with clubs, and blood shed. The Elders, far from repressing the acts of violence and stopping the blows of those who fell upon us have encouraged them to do worse."

An Algonkin chief told Father Le Jeune that his dreams and prophecies did not contain one ounce of truth.
The Hurons were demoralized, and they contented themselves with driving away the black robes from time to time, by flinging stones at them. The Iroquois, who had undertaken to invade and destroy Huronia, made the Jesuits into the sort of martyrs they apparently wanted to be.

"We may be on the point of shedding our blood," wrote Le Jeune, "and to sacrifice our lives in the service of our good Master Jesus Christ. It seems that his goodness wants to accept this sacrifice from me for the remission of my great and manifold sins. If He should want us to die at this very hour, then what a glorious hour it is for us! If God bestowed on me the grace of going to Heaven, then I would pray to God for the poor Hurons."

Iroquois' destruction of Huronia

In 1649, the Iroquois attacked and massacred. They benefitted from the weakened state of the Huron nation, laid waste by epidemics and divided by the presence of so many Christian converts. The Hurons had no European weapons either for the French refused to sell to them.

The Jesuits Daniel, Jogues, Lallemant, and Brébeuf were taken prisoner, tortured, and executed.

"About twelve hundred Iroquois came," a Huron remembered. "They took their anger out on the Fathers: they stripped them naked; they tore their fingernails off. They rained blows on their shoulders with sticks, on their kidneys and stomach and legs and face, and no part of their body was spared this torment."

Huronia was bathed in blood and fire. The Iroquois laid waste to Huronia.

Their vengeance knew no limit. Of the thirty thousand Hurons, a few thousand survived: some of which decided to live on the Île d'Orléans under the protection of the cannons of Quebec. "Since the faith entered into their hearts," wrote Father Le Jeune, "and they began to adore the Cross of Jesus Christ, He shared with them a part of this Cross, exposing them to miseries, torments and cruel deaths. In a word, this people has been wiped off the face of the Earth."

"My brother," a Huron chief said to a Frenchman, "your eyes cheat you when you look at us: you think you are seeing living beings, whereas we are only the spectres and souls of the departed."

It was the end of a people and a culture. Forty years after meeting the explorer Samuel de Champlain, the Huron nation was merely a vestige of its former self. A powerful nation had disappeared, victim of the fur trade, and an excess of zeal to convert it to Christianity. The beaver, the crucifix, and the Iroquois had killed it.

Company of One Hundred Associates

Between 1608 and 1624, Samuel de Champlain risked his life crossing the Atlantic twenty times. He searched for investors to develop the colony. He did not want New France to be reduced to merely two trading posts.

At the time of Henri IV's death in 1610, the Protestant companies of the north lacked the political clout to guarantee the survival of the French presence in North America, and with the appointment of Marie de Medici as regent, the Catholics controlled the political landscape.

Champlain needed a very powerful and deeply Catholic protector. From this time onward, the tone of his writings changed. Where he had written mostly of military exploits, he now maintained that the salvation of one soul was worth more than the conquest of an entire empire. Canada was certainly worth a mass, and it is impossible to sound the depths of this man, who described everything about the countries he explored without saying a word about himself.

Champlain presented the Paris Chamber of Commerce with an inventory of the natural riches of Canada. For the first time, the country was presented as the basic for economic development of a whole society.

"The immense forests are full of wood as far as the eye can see. "There must be 900,000 livres' worth of wood. The soil contains minerals of every sort. More than 1,000,000 livres. The rivers, lakes and oceans are brimming with fabulous

quantities of fish. 2,000,000 livres. Without counting what has already produced the wealth of the merchants of France. The traffic and trade of hides is not to be underestimated, sable, beaver, fox, lynx, the hides of deer, moose, buffalo are things from which, at present, it is possible to derive 400,000 livres."

Champlain argued that his colony would bring France some 6 million livres of revenue per year. In 1627, he managed to convince the most powerful man in France, Cardinal Richelieu, of the same thing. " Fur trading in Canada is much more practical in that we can dispense with money," wrote the Cardinal. "We use fur in exchange for goods such sheaths, scissors, knives, pocket-knives, needles, pins, pocket watches, hat strings, and all other sorts of goods."

Armand-Jean du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu found investors and established the Company of One Hundred Associates. Champlain's dream finally came true. From mere captain, Samuel de Champlain became Lieutenant to the Viceroy of Canada. He was governor of the colony, which at that time had 80 settlers.

The One Hundred Associates raised funds and sent ships to New France with 400 colonists. They never reached their destination, for they had chosen an unfortunate moment to cross the Atlantic. France and England were engaged in hostilities. The convoy was intercepted near Tadoussac by the Kirke brothers, privateers born in Dieppe, who had placed themselves in England's service.

Kirke Brothers and rebuilding Quebec

In 1628, France and England were at war. The Company of One Hundred Associates' convoy was intercepted near Tadoussac by the Kirke brothers, who were privateers born in Dieppe, France. They had placed themselves in the service of the King of England. The Kertk brothers (re-named Kirke by the British) belonged to the Calvinist bourgeoisie that had underwritten the development of Quebec.

Champlain recounted: "Louis Kirke landed about 150 armed men and took possession of the settlement. He came to the fort to drive me out. He planted the English flag on one of the bastions, sounded the drum, assembled his soldiers and fired the cannon to signal his joy."

The Kirke operation seemed to put an end to the dream Richelieu had of creating a totally Catholic New France. The Kirkes demanded the surrender of Quebec. Champlain refused but on July 19 1629, lacking rations and reinforcements, he was forced to surrender.

Champlain was granted all the honours of war, kept his arms and was escorted by one of the Kirkes to England, where he learned that the war between France and England had been over for three months by the time Quebec had surrendered. Champlain immediately launched a campaign to annul the conquest of New France. It took him three years of manoeuvring and proceedings but in the end he succeeded. Charles I of England agreed to return Canada to France, on condition that Louis XIII pay him the dowry of one million livres that he still owed.

After the surrender of Quebec by the Kirke brothers, Champlain returned to New France, at Richelieu's request.

He rebuilt Quebec, which had been devastated by the Kirkes. He established a trading post at Trois-Rivieres. However, there was an idea that he was still obsessed with: converting the Indians to Catholicism. He insisted to Richelieu that France must keep a presence in Huronia.

"There are enough people in these places who hope to have a number of Frenchmen and Religious to instruct them in our faith. This will increase the practice of religion and ensure an incredible trade in furs." His motives were more commercial than religious. Catholic Huron would go to heaven, but in the meantime, they would bring France as many beaver skins as possible.

Champlain was old and tired but he helped to bring new blood into the colony. Settlers landed and Quebec now had 400 inhabitants and an active mission in Huronia. His colony had taken root.

In early winter 1653, Samuel de Champlain died in Quebec.

New France's expansion

René-Robert Cavelier de La Salle

On the morning of April 9, 1682, René-Robert Cavelier de La Salle, who came from a rich family in Rouen, France, had his moment of glory.

From early childhood, Cavelier de La Salle dreamed of becoming one of history's great explorers. From the moment he arrived in North America, he was obsessed with the mysterious Western Sea and the treasures of China. Cavelier de La Salle arrived in the colony at the age of 24, having abandoned the Jesuit priesthood because of, as he said himself, "moral frailties." Governor Louis de Buade, comte de Frontenac, formed a partnership with him. Together they defied their church and their King.

The Canadians learned to build alliances with powerful Indian nations and became masters of the west, keeping their New England rivals penned up along the Atlantic shore. La Salle was the first Frenchmen to reach the mouth of the great river, the Mississippi.

"In the name of His Majesty I take possession of this land, Louisiana, he exclaimed, "with its adjacent harbours, ports, bays and straits and all its nations, peoples, provinces, cities, towns, villages, mines, fisheries, and rivers contained in Louisiana from the mouth of the great river called Ohio, and along the whole extent of the Mississippi River and the rivers that empty into it."

But La Salle had powerful enemies in Quebec and at court. Some considered him to be dangerous and others thought he was mad. And the King listened to them. He felt that la Salle's grand ambitions were at odds with France's colonial plans. Louis XIV wrote to the Governor at Quebec.

"I am convinced as you are that the discovery of Sieur de la Salle is quite useless and we must therefore prevent similar undertakings."

In 1682, Louis XIV had had enough and Frontenac was recalled to France. But Cavelier de La Salle did not give up easily. In order to pursue his explorations, he resorted to fraud and lies. He even deceived his own King. He told the King that the land he had discovered was rich in silver mines. On his maps, he tampered with the location of the mouth of the Mississippi, putting it 250 leagues (1,200 kilometres) farther to the west. He then persuaded the King that it would be the ideal place to put a colony that would serve as a base to attack the Spaniards to the south.

The fraud paid off. He was named commander of the entire territory that he had discovered and was put in command of 100 soldiers and a 36-gun warship. Le Gallois de Beaujeu, one of his officers, did not trust him.

"There are very few of us who don't think he is a little crazy. I've talked to people who have known him for 20 years. Everyone says he's always been a bit visionary."

The expedition he undertook in 1687 was a disaster. La Salle sailed from France to the Gulf of Mexico but soon got lost. For two years he wandered, without maps, in the marshes of the Mississippi delta. Some of his troops died; others revolted. On the morning of March 19, 1687, Pierre Duhaut shot La Salle in the head. He and other members of the expedition then stripped him bare and took his possessions. Henri Joutel, a member of the expedition, stated that Cavelier de La Salle had the mind and the talent to succeed in his undertaking:

"Resoluteness, courage... and indefatigable labour, by which he overcame all obstacles, would have finally won him a glorious success, if all these fine qualities had not been offset by his haughty manner and harshness toward those who were placed under him, which made him the object of implacable hatred and was the cause of his death."

Between 1672 and 1682, the French took possession of an immense continent. But Frontenac's policy had scattered the colony's resources, wreaked havoc with its native alliances, and upset the merchants, administrators, and clergy.

In less than 20 years, La Salle and others such as Louis Jolliet, Nicolas Perrot, and Daniel Duluth had flung back New France's boundaries and reached far into the interior of the continent. The governor of the English colony of New York, Thomas Dongan, could not get over their boldness. "Tis a hard thing that all countries a Frenchman walks over in America must belong to Canada."

The alcohol problem

The coureurs des bois (French traders) gave alcohol to the Indians in exchange for their furs.

Alcohol increased their profits. The colony was divided into two camps: those who supported the trade in alcohol with the Indians and those who denounced it as dishonourable. Alcohol had a devastating effect on those who believed in illusions and spirits. François de Laval, Bishop of Quebec, described the effects in his Pastoral Letter of February 24, 1662:

"The village or the cabin where savages drink spirits is an image of hell: fire is flickering about on all sides: they hack away with axes and knives, spilling blood everywhere; everywhere are heard dreadful yells and howling. They are at each others throats, they rip each others' ears off. The father and mother throw their little children onto hot coals or into boiling caldrons."

As problems increased, native leaders demanded that the traffic in spirits be stopped, and François de Laval issued a threat of excommunication to the French who were giving alcohol to the Indians:

"Since we are obliged by the duties of our position to oppose with all our power this flood of disorder, we hereby proclaim the excommunication of all those who give, in whatever manner, intoxicating drinks to the savages, unless it be one or two cups per day of the ordinary little measure that is given to French labourers, in other words, two small shots of spirits per day."

But commercial competition won out over good intentions. The alcohol trade became so ill-regulated that the King ordered Frontenac to summon twenty of the most important merchants in the colony. They gathered in Quebec on October 10, 1678. Only two out of the twenty were against the sale of alcohol to the natives.

According to the Intendant Jacques Duchesneau, "...the trade in question puts both the French and the savages in a state of damnation, the one party for their defiance of the orders of the church and the other because they only drink to get intoxicated." Some people, such as the explorer Louis Jolliet, looked for a compromise and proposed:

"...that the habitants be allowed to give them alcohol in their homes and in those places where it is traded in moderation, and that any disorders meet with punishment."

The majority of the merchants were in favour of the trade in spirits, with no restrictions. Cavelier de La Salle was among them. And it was obvious that he also expressed the views of his associate, Louis de Buade, comte de Frontenac:

"It is up to lay people exclusively to decide what is good or bad for trade, and not churchmen... The savages won't trade unless we sell it [alcohol] to them, which is the only reason

that makes them come among us... they can find it closer and in greater abundance from the foreigners."

Louis XIV finally allowed the trade in alcohol in French settlements but forbade alcohol to be brought into Indian villages.

An anonymous observer wrote:

"Frenchmen unworthy of the name derive huge profits from this disgraceful commerce, because once they have intoxicated the savages, they strip off their clothes, their weapons and anything else they may have sold them beforehand. Some Frenchmen have admitted to getting 15,000 livres worth of beaver skins out of a single barrel of spirits worth no more than 200 livres."

The fur trade

In the years after 1670, hundreds of men from New France set off on a great adventure. They left the rigours of the St. Lawrence colony to seek their fortune in the fur trade, in the Pays d'en Haut (the Upper Country or the area around the Great Lakes).

An anonymous observer denounced the irresistible attraction of life in the upper country:

"The coureurs des bois lead a life of perpetual idleness... They live in a state of complete independence; they don't have to account for their actions to anyone; they recognize no superior, no judge, no laws."

They ignored direct orders to stay along the St. Lawrence, orders from Jean-Baptiste Colbert, France's colonial minister, who wanted to increase the population. New France at the time had only 10,000 inhabitants while the English colonies to the south had more than 100,000.

"It would be better to restrict yourselves to an extent of land which the colony could protect by itself, than to claim too vast an amount, part of which one might perhaps be obliged one day to abandon."

Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the minister of marine for Louis XIV, had other reasons to be worried. In the colony of New York, Albany had become an important trading post, competing with Montreal and Quebec. Tension was rising in North America.

Thomas Dongan, governor of New York, set the Iroquois against the French and their native allies.

"The King my master has forbidden me to supply arms and munitions against the French; but you should not be alarmed by this interdiction: you will lack nothing you need to mete out justice; I would supply you at my own expense."

In the Upper Country, the French attempted to consolidate their all-important alliances with the Indians. Muskets had upset the equilibrium between nations. Chiefs wished to ally themselves with the best supplier, for their survival depended upon it.

Nicolas Perrot was the most influential French ambassador amongst the nations of the west.

"There is not a single nation that does not say it was founded to make war on the others. When they have wanted to go to war, have I not given them to consider ... that they should rather support one another against the Iroquois, who are the enemies of all?"

His most important task was to convince the Indians of the west that it was in their interest to support the French and not the English.

"When the English wanted to bring them over to their side... made them understand that they were going to ally themselves with traitors who had poisoned some of the nations that had been found in their country. And that after having intoxicated the men, they had sacrificed and carried off their women and their children to send them to distant islands, from which they never returned."

By the time Frontenac was recalled to France, the colony was too weak to defend its allies. The Iroquois took advantage, sowing terror among the nations of the west.

The Intendant Jacques Duscheneau recognized the danger:

"If we leave the Iroquois alone, they will subjugate the Illinois, and in very little time they will make themselves masters of all the nations of the Ottawa and will redirect trade to the English. From which it follows as an absolute necessity that we must either make them our friends or destroy them."