

Chapter 1

Looking for China — and Finding Quebec! (1524–1610)

In This Chapter

- Exploring the New World
 - Looking at the role of the French in founding Quebec
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The New World nation of Quebec was founded by adventurers, missionaries, and women and men who wanted to improve their lot and dreamed of a better world. When they crossed the ocean in the 15th and 16th centuries, Europe was experiencing an unprecedented period of growth. Portugal, Spain, and England were seeking new routes to China. Taking advantage of new scientific discoveries, sailors set out to sea, crossed the Atlantic, discovered America, and founded colonies.

France, 16th-century Europe's leader in wealth and population, made the first move to colonize Quebec. In this chapter, I fill you in on when and why French leaders decided to set out for the New World, the circumstances that fed their curiosity about these vast western lands, and the ambitions that drove the French state. I also explain what the early explorers discovered (hint: they weren't the first people there) and what kind of relationship developed between the French and the indigenous peoples. Finally, I tell you why the French decided to settle in the St. Lawrence Valley and found Quebec.

Setting Out to Conquer the West

In the 16th century, all western European powers were curious about the New World. This desire to travel and look beyond their shores took shape in the context of the Renaissance, an extraordinary and unprecedented period of artistic and intellectual growth and economic and political upheaval.

The Vikings: First explorers to the party

Well before the 16th century, the Vikings had explored the shores of the American continent. This great nation of conquering mariners originated in Scandinavia. They established settlements in Greenland that lasted three centuries, founding villages and erecting a bishop's palace. Greenland was not very far

from the shores of Newfoundland, and Vikings settled there around the year 1000 A.D. Their presence lasted several centuries, but they had completely abandoned Newfoundland by the time a later generation of Europeans decided to set out.

Why the Europeans wanted to explore

A combination of factors explains western Europeans' sudden desire to explore a vast world:

- ✓ **The fall of Constantinople:** Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, was the gateway to Asia for Europeans. Caravans brought back silks, precious gems, and spices (which were used to preserve staple foods). Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, which spelled trouble for the Europeans: The gateway to Asia was now closed. To import these riches from the Orient again, new routes had to be explored to avoid Arab and Muslim peoples who were hostile to Christian Europe, and for good reason: Christians had repeatedly invaded their part of the world during the bloody Crusades of the Middle Ages.
- ✓ **The search for gold:** In the 15th century, a number of European cities experienced rapid growth. Paris, Naples, Venice, and Florence each had more than 100,000 inhabitants. With the economy flourishing, gold coins were increasingly required for commerce. Suppliers in North Africa and the Middle East wanted to be paid in hard cash. The problem: Gold mines supplying Europeans were running out. For growth to continue, new deposits had to be found, and the New World was a place to look.

Who went where

To find a new way of reaching Asia or to venture into distant lands to discover gold, technical innovation was vital. People needed more sophisticated methods of navigation, and they had to have faster and better ships that could accommodate large crews and heavy loads of food.

The Renaissance atmosphere prevailing in Europe gave rise not only to lively discussions among scholars but also to a variety of innovations that were useful to the great adventurers. They could now set out to sea for months at a time. No ambition was too great for the intrepid sailors, mostly of Italian origin, who staffed these ships. The race to Asia could begin!

Portugal finds a route around Africa

The Portuguese were the first to undertake this bold odyssey. Led by Henry the Navigator, the Portuguese discovered the Azores and explored the coast of Africa. In 1488, they rounded the Cape of Good Hope, opening the route to India. Ten years later, Vasco de Gama reached the Indian subcontinent.

Spain discovers America

These Portuguese successes led Spain, Portugal's great neighbor and competitor, to follow suit. With the southern route already explored, the Italian navigator Christopher Columbus urged Spain to finance a westward expedition — a truly bold venture because the route was completely unknown.

But circumstances favored Columbus. In 1492, the Spanish monarchs defeated the Arabs and achieved full political union. On October 12 of that year, Columbus reached unknown territory. He was not in Asia, however, but in America. The Spaniards settled in and were soon exploiting the new continent's gold.

English incursions farther north

These impressive Spanish conquests stirred envy in other countries. England also had ambitions of finding new ways to Asia, but by a northerly route. On May 2, 1497, Giovanni Caboto (called John Cabot by the English) left the port of Bristol. On June 24, he reached the shores of Newfoundland, planted an English flag, and took possession. He, too, thought he had arrived in Asia. He returned the following year but soon became disenchanted: These new lands offered plenty of fish and furs but very little gold or other precious metals.

What they found when they arrived: An inhabited New World

Neither Spain nor England discovered a route to Asia. Between the Orient of their dreams and Old Europe lay a New World inhabited by a variety of unknown peoples.

The origins of “Homo americanus”

The earliest inhabitants of the New World were members of the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*. These bipeds were capable of producing tools and had a good knowledge of flora. Their presence in America resulted from two waves of immigration: They came from Asia across the Bering Strait or by sea along the west coast of the American continent in small boats, arriving about 15,000 years ago (or as long as 30,000 years ago, by some accounts) and settling mostly in South America. These migrants belonged to tribes that hunted herds of mammoths and buffalo.

About 5,000 years ago, a second wave of migrants followed the same route but settled in the northwest. This second wave arrived at the end of a long ice age estimated to have begun about 100,000 years earlier. For thousands of years, Quebec, along with the entire northeast of the continent, was covered with a thick layer of ice. With the ice receding, living in the more northerly regions was possible.

Number and diversity

At the time the first Europeans arrived, the American continent may have been inhabited by about 80 million people, most of whom lived in the south. The indigenous population of North America is thought to have been somewhere between 4 million and 9 million; of these, 500,000 to 2 million lived in Canada.

The first Europeans to arrive were immediately struck by the cultural diversity of the peoples they encountered. Most had their own languages, ancestral customs, and spiritual beliefs. Some nomadic people lived from hunting, fishing, and gathering. Subsistence for these people was easy in the summer but more difficult in the winter. Others were partly sedentary, combining cultivation of the soil with nomadic subsistence activities and living in large settlements. Rivalries for control of a resource or a territory often erupted between indigenous peoples. Wars sometimes set them violently against one another well before the Europeans arrived.



Although their customs were very different from those of the Europeans and their means of fighting were less sophisticated, they were neither bloodthirsty barbarians nor noble savages motivated solely by higher thoughts. The passions that moved them were similar to those of the Europeans.

Culture shock

The encounter between the Europeans and *First Nations* (the various indigenous people in Canada) produced a real shock, for both sides. To begin with, the Europeans came bearing illnesses that wiped out huge numbers of indigenous people, because they lacked the protective immunity to fight these

diseases. The Europeans suffered less from bacteriological shock, but many died in adapting to the new continent, especially in the winter months.

The shock was also cultural. The Montagnais of northern Quebec thought the first ships were floating islands, saw their sails as strange clouds, and believed the first cannon shots were horrible thunderclaps. They were fascinated by the hairiness of the Europeans, as well as by the wine they drank while eating, which they initially thought was blood.

This culture shock also affected the Europeans, who saw more relaxed social and sexual customs among the indigenous peoples and a more liberal way of raising children. They also discovered a number of new products: tobacco, maple sap, canoes, and snowshoes.



The three indigenous groups in Quebec

When the Europeans arrived, three main indigenous groups shared the territory of Quebec. Each of them was subdivided into tribes and occupied a specific part of the territory. These three groups were as follows:

- ✓ **The Algonquians:** Made up of nomadic tribes, the Algonquian peoples were divided as follows: the Montagnais (or Innu) roamed along the north shore of the St. Lawrence as far as the St. Maurice River; the Cree lived south of James Bay; the Maliseet lived along the St. John River; the Odawa inhabited the Témiscamingue region and the area north of Lake Huron; the Algonquians proper covered an area along the north shore of the Ottawa and St. Lawrence rivers extending from the Témiscamingue region to west of the St. Maurice. Other Algonquian tribal groups lived outside Quebec's current boundaries (such as the Mi'kmaq of the maritime provinces and the Ojibwa of Lake Superior). The French generally maintained good relations with these peoples.
- ✓ **The Iroquoians:** When Jacques Cartier arrived from France in 1535, Iroquoian tribes

were settled at Stadacona (in what is now Quebec City) and Hochelaga (Montreal). In the latter part of the 16th century, the Iroquoian tribes abandoned these posts and settled farther south and west. When the French returned early in the 17th century, the Iroquoians had disappeared. Consisting mostly of semi-sedentary tribes, this major Aboriginal family included the Iroquois, divided into the Five Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy: Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas. They lived in the areas around Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The Hurons of the Great Lakes, with whom the French established close relations, were also part of the broader Iroquoian cultural family, as were the Pétuns and the Neutral, even though the Iroquois regarded them all as irreconcilable enemies.

- ✓ **The Inuit (or Eskimos):** Completely isolated from the two other Aboriginal families in Quebec and from the early French colonists, the Inuit (or Eskimos) lived in Labrador and the far north.

Finally, the Europeans brought firearms with them. These weapons transformed relationships and led to new wars. Even though the balance of power clearly favored the colonists from Old Europe, both First Nations and Europeans were transformed by this encounter. Confrontation with indigenous peoples was sometimes brutal. To establish their culture and religion, the Spanish massacred entire populations or reduced them to slavery. In comparison, the French, perhaps because they were fewer in number, adopted a more open attitude.

France gets into the race

Compared to Portugal and Spain, 16th-century France did not seem to be in any great hurry to find a new route to Asia. This was because its attention was turned more toward Italy and the Mediterranean, which remained the great trade crossroads of Europe. The Spanish conquest and the achievement of Magellan's crew in circling the entire world in three years (1519–1522), discovering a passage between South America and Antarctica along the way, finally persuaded France to get into the race.

Verrazzano's exploration

Financed by bankers in Lyon and backed by King Francis I, the Florentine sailor Giovanni da Verrazzano explored the Atlantic coast of North America in 1524. When he began his trip, the shores of South America, the Caribbean, Florida, and Newfoundland had been mapped. But the central part of North America's Atlantic coast remained unknown. During his two-month expedition aboard the *Dauphine*, Verrazzano tried to find a route leading to "Cathay," another name for China. Such a discovery would leapfrog what Magellan had found, enabling France to get back on top.

After reaching North Carolina in March, he headed north along the coast, setting foot on the continent several times. The land he discovered seemed to him "the most pleasant and the most favorable there could be for any type of crop." He met indigenous peoples, regarding some of them as courteous and polite but others as barbaric and hostile. In political and economic terms, Verrazzano's expedition was a failure. However, thanks to him, Europeans learned, as Verrazzano himself wrote, "this land or New World . . . forms an entity. It is not attached to Asia or to Africa. . . . This continent thus seems to be enclosed between the eastern sea and the western sea."

Jacques Cartier arrives in Gaspé

This conviction on Verrazzano's part did not convince everyone. The hope of finding a route to Asia persisted, and the riches of the new continent stirred

greed. The French king chose Jacques Cartier, a sailor from Saint-Malo, near the boundary between the French provinces of Brittany and Normandy, to lead a new expedition. Cartier's mission was "to discover certain islands where it is said that we may find a large quantity of gold and other rich things."

On April 20, 1534, he left the port of Saint-Malo. It was a modest expedition, with just two ships and 60 men. After a rapid crossing, Cartier arrived in Newfoundland, followed the Strait of Belle Isle, and sailed down the west coast of Newfoundland. He then explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Baie des Chaleurs, where he met Aboriginals from the Mi'kmaq tribe. After following the Gaspé peninsula to where the town of Gaspé now lies, he came across other Aboriginals of the Iroquoian family.

"Long live the King of France"

The people Cartier encountered were from Stadacona (in present-day Quebec City) and were there to fish for mackerel. The contact went fairly well. Cartier saw them as true "savages." In his diary, he wrote, "They have only small skins as clothing, which they use to cover the indecent parts of the body. . . . Their heads are completely shaved. . . . They eat flesh nearly raw."

On July 24, Cartier erected a cross "30 feet high" on which was written "Long live the King of France," a gesture the Iroquoians did not much appreciate. Using facial expressions, they indicated that these lands belonged to them and that they saw the erection of this cross as improper. As explorers of that era often did, Cartier kidnapped two Aboriginals, the sons of the chief with whom he had established ties during his brief stay in Gaspé. On July 25, Cartier's crew continued on its course, going around Anticosti Island, following part of the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and returning to France, circumventing the shores of Newfoundland.

The results of this initial expedition by Cartier were rather meager: no route to Asia, no discovery of gold. The longstanding claim that Jacques Cartier "discovered" Canada in 1534 is probably exaggerated. Cartier clearly planted a cross and took symbolic possession of a territory, but he did not found a colony.

The "Kingdom of Saguenay"

The next year, Cartier set out again. The two captive Aboriginals, presented to the king, held out the prospect of magnificent discoveries. A majestic river, they said, would lead to the village of Stadacona. Cartier was overjoyed: What if this were a new route to Asia? The two young Iroquois claimed that there was a fabulous place overflowing with wealth: the "Kingdom of Saguenay." No more was needed to whet the curiosity of the French.

On July 26, 1535, the three ships of Jacques Cartier's second expedition reached Blanc-Sablon, at the eastern edge of what is now Quebec's North Shore. After sailing into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Cartier's men approached Île d'Orléans and Stadacona. The two Aboriginals, by now dressed European-style and speaking French fairly well, were returned to their community. Cartier met Donnacona, their chief, who tried to dissuade him from continuing farther south. But the sailor from Saint-Malo had other ideas in mind. His goal was to reach Hochelaga, in present-day Montreal, to seek a new route to Asia.

On the evening of October 3, Cartier saw the fortified settlement at the foot of a small hill, which he named "Mount Royal." Approximately 1,000 Aboriginals lived there in about 50 long, spacious houses. The contact was warm. They exchanged presents. Cartier climbed Mount Royal on foot. He admired the mountain ranges in the distance and saw that the river turned into rapids, later called the Lachine Rapids. Cartier believed this river route could lead to the Kingdom of Saguenay. On October 5, he returned to Stadacona, where relations with Chief Donnacona had deteriorated. The chief had advised Cartier against going to Hochelaga, perhaps because he wished to maintain a privileged connection with the French sailor.



The scourge of scurvy

For the first time, Frenchmen decided to spend the winter in the St. Lawrence Valley, a decision some of them would later regret. Ill prepared for the rigors of the climate, many sailors suffered from scurvy, a disease resulting from a vitamin C deficiency. The Europeans ravaged by this illness lost their teeth and their strength. Twenty-five of the 110 men in Cartier's crew succumbed to it, but the ordeal did not discourage Cartier. He insisted on discovering the Kingdom of Saguenay, but he lacked men and food to continue his mission. To learn more about this mysterious kingdom, he brought Donnacona and two of his sons to France — without, of course, seeking their approval. None of them would see their homeland again.

Conscript prisoners

Jacques Cartier's tales captivated King Francis I, who had visions of securing the wealth of Saguenay for his kingdom, but it would be some time before a new expedition set out. Cartier earned some promotions but was soon outflanked by a nobleman, Jean-François de La Roque, Seigneur de Roberval. Appointed "lieutenant general of Canada," Roberval was placed in charge of an important mission. He was not only to explore or exploit a territory but also to found a true colony and convert the indigenous peoples to the Christian faith.

Origin of the words *Canada* and *Quebec*

The first occurrences of the word *kanata* appear in Jacques Cartier's accounts of his travels. The kidnapped Aborigines spoke to him of the "kanata" road, meaning "cluster of huts." The kanata road was the one that led to the interior of the continent and to a village. But the word stuck, and *Canada* came to designate the lands over which Donnacona reigned and to which the majestic river led. Later, French administrators used the name *Canada* to refer to the inhabited territories of the St. Lawrence Valley. Part of New France in the mid-18th

century, Canada was separate from Acadia and Louisiana.

In the original writings of the explorers, Quebec was written *Kébec*. This Algonquian word means "the place where the river narrows." If you had sailed upriver from the Gulf of St. Lawrence, you would find that the two banks were closest together at Quebec City. The explorers naturally came to use the word *Kébec* to designate what would become the capital of New France.

Though Cartier did not lead this third expedition, he was nevertheless part of it. He left France before Roberval, on May 25, 1541, at the head of five vessels. The two men had trouble persuading other Frenchmen to embark with them. Lacking volunteers, they conscripted criminals. Two months later, Cartier arrived in Stadacona with his crew alone. Roberval had been delayed.

"As false as Canadian diamonds"

When Cartier arrived in Stadacona, the Aborigines received news of Donnacona, who had died around 1539. Relations with the Aborigines were tense, so much so that Cartier decided to settle upriver in a spot he named "Charlesbourg-Royal." Members of his crew thought they had discovered diamonds and gold there, finds that appealed to Cartier's greed. In a hurry to show these diamonds to the royal court, he prepared a hasty return.

On June 7, 1542, he met up with Roberval in St. John's, Newfoundland. The lieutenant general of Canada was obviously counting on the pilot from Saint-Malo to guide him. But in the middle of the night, Cartier left him in the lurch and returned to France. Sadly, what he thought were diamonds were merely quartz pebbles and iron pyrite ("fool's gold"), giving rise to the long-used expression "as false as Canadian diamonds."

Cartier's trans-Atlantic career came to an abrupt end. What he had learned by exploring the St. Lawrence would serve later sailors who ventured into the same waters, but his quick return to France was his undoing. No further expedition would be entrusted to him. With nobody to guide him, Roberval stumbled blindly into a continent he scarcely knew. In the spring of 1543, he decided to go back to France. The founding of a French colony in the St. Lawrence Valley was put off indefinitely.

Moving toward the Founding of Quebec

It would be a good half-century before France again considered establishing itself in North America. There were efforts to set up colonies in Brazil and Florida between 1555 and 1565, but these failed as abysmally as had the first attempt in the St. Lawrence Valley. In the second half of the 16th century, France was torn by internal struggles. From 1562 to 1598, a series of religious wars considerably weakened royal authority. Violent conflicts caused the death of two to four million French people. This was a time for consolidation of the kingdom, not imperial expansion. Henry IV's accession to the throne in 1589 provided a way out of the crisis. In 1598, with his Edict of Nantes, the Huguenot who had converted to Catholicism allowed Protestants freedom of conscience, enabling France to achieve a degree of peace.

Focusing on the fur trade

Though the French state may have neglected the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the shores of Newfoundland, fishermen and merchants did not. Jacques Cartier's travels were known to ship owners in Normandy and Brittany, and they fully intended to exploit the wealth of these distant lands. Sailors from northwestern France soon encountered Basque and Spanish vessels pursuing the same commercial goals.

From cod to beaver

The ship owners' primary interest lay in fishing. The shores of Newfoundland teemed with cod. Between 1550 and 1580, French cod fishermen from Saint-Malo, Dieppe, Rouen, and Bordeaux brought back sizable cargoes of fish. At a time when many practicing Christians were forbidden from eating meat on Friday, fish provided essential protein. Though this trade may have been less lucrative than dealing in gold, precious gems, or spices, it was profitable enough to be worth pursuing for several decades.

Around 1580, a new trade was added to fishing: the fur trade. From the 1550s on, cod fishermen brought back furs from America in addition to their cargoes of fish. The supply of beaver pelts came from exchanging goods with the indigenous peoples. Much in demand in European high society, these pelts found ready buyers — fur hats were in vogue.

During the 1570s, furs from America benefited from a tense political situation in Europe. Access to furs from Russia, the traditional supplier of this luxury good, was made difficult by blockades in the Baltic Sea. Norman and Breton

merchants sensed that this would be a good business for them, and they began to focus on the fur trade in the early 1580s. Basques also got into the game. In the Gulf of St. Lawrence, competition became fierce. The European market soon became flooded with American furs, and the price collapsed as a result. Customers were obviously not complaining, but the ship owners demanded government intervention to regulate the trade.

An early public-private partnership

In 1587, open war broke out between fur traders. Ships were burned in the St. Lawrence River. The following year, King Henry III of France innovated by awarding a fur trade and mining monopoly in the St. Lawrence Valley to Jacques Noël, a nephew of Jacques Cartier, for a 12-year period. Labor was also guaranteed — the king allowed him to select “60 persons, either men or women, each year in our prisons.” In exchange for this monopoly, Noël and his associate agreed to build the structures needed to operate his business. This privilege came as a shock to the Breton traders. In their eyes, Noël had neither the talent nor the knowledge to run a monopoly of this kind. They all but accused him of being an impostor. On May 5, 1588, Henry III yielded to their arguments and restored free trade in the St. Lawrence Valley.

This sort of about-face would recur several times. Other monopolies would be granted and then withdrawn. Until 1627, France proved very hesitant. On rare occasions, it aspired to found a real colony in North America and extend its influence over the New World. But most of the time, resources failed to follow. Lacking political ambition, France turned to monopolies, which it awarded to a series of resourceful and adventurous merchants whose primary ambition was something other than founding a colony. Driven mostly by material interests, these merchants sought above all to run their businesses. For a long time, French policy looked very much like what we now call PPPs (public-private partnerships): The government awards privileges to an individual or company. In return, it expects this individual or company to look after public responsibilities: building bridges and other infrastructure, transporting and helping with the upkeep of colonists, and so on.

Meeting Samuel de Champlain: A true visionary

Fortunately, the vision and unshakable convictions of an exceptional individual, Samuel de Champlain, made up for this hesitant and haphazard French policy. Had it not been for this remarkable person, Quebec would not have been founded.



An illegitimate son of Henry IV?

It was only very recently, in April 2012, that Samuel de Champlain's baptismal certificate was discovered. Baptized as a Protestant in La Rochelle on August 13, 1574, he later converted to Catholicism. Champlain grew up in Brouage, a small port city in the French province of Saintonge, in rather modest circumstances.

In early adulthood, he seemed to have had privileged access to King Henry IV. Starting in the summer of 1601, the king awarded him an annual pension — a very rare favor. Some researchers say this privileged link could have been due to a filial relationship: Samuel de Champlain may have been one of Henry IV's many illegitimate sons.

The king's openness to human diversity, his genuine tolerance of varied beliefs, and his skill in conciliation and compromise appear to have left a deep impression on the young Champlain. His talents as a draughtsman and cartographer may be what first drew attention to him. He was also a highly experienced sailor who crossed the Atlantic at least 27 times between 1599 and 1633. In the many writings he left, he showed great curiosity about the flora and the peoples he discovered. From the time of his earliest voyages, he was convinced that riches abounded in this New World land. But to grow and prosper, he said, this young colony would need settlers. If it remained a mere trading post, the colony would have no future. It was vital for a population to take root there.

Renewed colonial ambitions

Henry IV, who had great ambitions for his kingdom, revived the project of colonizing North America. Several attempts were made. In 1598, about 40 beggars, vagabonds, and prisoners were sent to Sable Island, off the coast of present-day Nova Scotia. Left to their own devices, they revolted and killed one another. By 1603, only 11 of them were still alive.

In 1600, a merchant to whom the king had just awarded a monopoly organized an expedition to Tadoussac, a small post at the mouth of the Saguenay River, a fur-trade crossroads already well known to sailors. The small dwelling built there was not suited to the climate. During the winter of 1600–1601, a number of Frenchmen gave up the ghost in Tadoussac.

Champlain was not involved in these expeditions. From 1599 to 1601, he explored Spanish colonies in South America, where he was shocked by the treatment inflicted on indigenous peoples. In 1603, a new expedition was mounted by Commander Aymar de Chaste, the new holder of the fur-pelt monopoly in the St. Lawrence. Champlain learned of the existence of this mission and found a way of joining it — as a simple observer (though everyone knew he had the king's ear). The crew set sail in March. The purpose was less to establish a colony than to reconnoiter the area and establish links with the indigenous peoples.



“Smoking up” in Tadoussac

On May 26, 1603, the French landed at Tadoussac. Montagnais from various tribes were there, along with Algonquians living farther south. The encounter went quite well. There was a reason for the Algonquians’ good humor: Some of them were fresh from a stirring victory against their Iroquois enemies. The French noticed about 100 scalps dripping with blood.

The presence of Montagnais interpreters who had spent some time in France facilitated communication. The tales they told of their time in Europe caught the attention of the other Montagnais. The representatives from the Old World were then welcomed as prestigious guests! The grand chief who was there said he favored the establishment of the French on the territory, but on condition that they fight the Iroquois enemy.

A great feast followed these warm exchanges. Champlain ate moose for the first time: Its flesh, he noted, tasted like beef. Once the meal was over, chants and dances delighted the Frenchmen. “All the women and girls began to remove their skin robes and became totally naked, showing their natural state,” Champlain noted. He was impressed by the beauty of these “well rounded” Montagnais women! “All these peoples,” he wrote, “have well-proportioned bodies, with no deformities.” The gathering was a real success. It sealed a basic alliance that would enable the French to establish roots in the St. Lawrence Valley. In a ceremony typical of major festivities among Aboriginal peoples, they smoked tobacco, a sign of the respectful relations between the early French and the natives of the St. Lawrence Valley. These relationships of trust would enable the French to explore the interior of the continent and confront the harsh winters as they set out to discover heretofore unknown rivers, lakes, and regions.

Champlain used this visit to explore the Saguenay River. He was impressed by the depth of its fjord and by the white beluga whales that came to the surface. Along the river, he saw only mountains and forests. There was no site that seemed suitable for colonization. He decided to sail up the St. Lawrence and check places explored by Jacques Cartier 60 years earlier. On June 22, he cast anchor at the former village of Stadacona, which was now uninhabited. Champlain continued inland, crossing the mouth of the St. Maurice and reaching Montreal Island, where the village of Hochelaga had also disappeared.

Founding Quebec

Back in France, Champlain published the account of his journey to Tadoussac. The gathering with indigenous people fascinated readers hungry for exotic tales. But even with the encouraging prospects he described, and despite fur traders’ expeditions, the French did not settle in the St. Lawrence Valley until 1608. After Aymar de Chaste died suddenly, the monopoly was awarded to Pierre Dugay de Mons, a Protestant from Saintonge whom Champlain knew

well. Dugua de Mons chose the Atlantic coast over the St. Lawrence Valley. Being easier to reach, it seemed to be a region better suited for trading and for establishing a settlement. Therefore, with the king's agreement, Dugua de Mons set his sights on Acadia. Champlain complied with this decision, but the experiences of Sainte-Croix Island (during the winter of 1604–1605) and Port-Royal (1605–1607) were inconclusive in the short term.

Chaotic beginnings

These disappointing results left Henry IV impatient and gave ammunition to competitors of Dugua de Mons. In 1608, the king renewed his monopoly, but for only one year. With some effort, Champlain persuaded Dugua de Mons to return to the St. Lawrence Valley. In April 1608, the *Lévrier* and the *Don-de-Dieu*, under the command of François Gravé du Pont and Champlain, left the port of Honfleur. Thus far, France's attempts at colonization in North America had all met with failure. This was a last-chance mission — it was make it or break it.

The arrival at Tadoussac on June 3 did not bode well. Basques were trading furs there, openly contravening the monopoly awarded by the French king. When Gravé du Pont ordered them to cease their activities, the Basques fired on the French. Champlain, a skilled negotiator, intervened, and both parties agreed to settle the matter in France.



On July 3, the crew arrived at Quebec. At the foot of a rocky cape, along the shores of the St. Lawrence, Champlain had his “habitation” built. The two-story structure served as a workshop, a warehouse, a dwelling, and even a temporary fortress. But why did he favor this site over others? There were essentially two reasons:

- ✓ **It was an ideal site for defense.** Quebec provides plenty of advantages in military terms. This is where the banks of the St. Lawrence are closest to each other. The rocky cape, later named Cape Diamond, provides an excellent view of the river, making it easier to see the enemy and prepare accordingly.
- ✓ **It was a trade crossroads.** Deeper into the interior of the continent than Tadoussac, Quebec was closer to sources of fur supply. A number of tribes friendly to the French crossed paths there.

A foiled plot

François Gravé du Pont and Samuel de Champlain brought a number of indentured workers with them. Among them were carpenters, blacksmiths, and a surgeon, but there were no women or clerics. As soon as they arrived there was plenty to do, and the men set to work.

Locksmith Jean Duval had other ideas, however. A schemer, Duval persuaded three other men to assassinate Champlain, take control of the new colony, and establish an alliance with the Basques. A few days before the planned attack, one of the conspirators broke down and told the whole story. His former accomplices were taken into custody, along with the initiator of this mini-coup d'état. A trial was held, the first in the history of Quebec. The four men were sentenced to death, but Duval's three comrades were sent back to France. Duval himself "was hanged and strangled in the said Quebec," Champlain reported, "and his head was placed at the end of a spike to be planted in our fort's most prominent place."

Consolidating an alliance

To secure what was intended to be a permanent presence in Quebec, links with the indigenous peoples of the St. Lawrence Valley had to be strengthened. The safety of the few Frenchmen there was at stake. The strongest ties are often created in adversity, and Champlain renewed his 1603 promise to fight the Iroquois enemy at the earliest opportunity.

In the summer of 1609, the French moved into action. On June 28, they left Quebec with their allies, headed for Iroquois country. "I resolved to go and fulfill my promise," Champlain wrote, "and I embarked with the savages in their canoes, taking with me two men of good will." A few days later, after going up the Richelieu River, they reached the large lake that the founder of Quebec named after himself. This was the first time Frenchmen had explored this area. The expedition enabled Champlain to observe indigenous beliefs and ways of waging war. One thing that really struck him was the great importance indigenous people attached to premonitions in their dreams — they kept asking him what his own dreams foretold.

On the morning of July 30, the confrontation took place at Ticonderoga, at the narrow passage between Lake Champlain and Lake George. The fight pitted the allies of the French (Hurons, Algonquians, and Montagnais) against 200 Iroquois from the Mohawk tribe. Hidden behind his companions and armed with a *harquebus* (an early type of portable gun), Champlain awaited a signal before advancing. Then "our men began calling to me loudly, splitting in two to open the way to me, and I stood at the head, marching 20 paces forward until I was some 30 paces from the enemy. Once they saw me, they halted while contemplating me, and I them." The bearded European, dressed in a coat of armor that glinted in the sun, took the Mohawks by surprise. Champlain aimed at two of their chiefs, killing them with a single shot. Two Frenchmen flanking him on either side immediately opened fire. These murderous thunderclaps threw the Iroquois off stride, and they beat a hasty retreat. The courage shown by Champlain and his strategic use of firearms impressed his indigenous allies. The French demonstrated, above all, that they could keep their word.

Aboriginal torture

Returning from this initial victorious campaign against the Iroquois, the French learned of the treatment that First Nations people could inflict on their enemies. The founder of Quebec was horrified by the tortures and acts of cruelty casually meted out to the dozen captured prisoners.

After celebrating their victory, they turned to the captives as if it were a familiar ritual. They burned them with firebrands, tore out their fingernails, poured boiling water on their heads, and pierced their arms near the wrist. After killing one of the prisoners, they opened

his belly, threw his entrails into the lake, and cut his heart into pieces that the other prisoners were forced to eat. “This is how these peoples behave,” stated Champlain, deeply shocked by what he saw. “It would be better for them to die fighting . . . than to fall into the hands of their enemies.”

This violence helped the warriors exorcise the fears they felt during combat. When Champlain or other Europeans argued that these treatments were inhumane, the Aboriginals responded that if the situation were reversed, their enemies would treat them the same way.

On June 19, 1610, a new confrontation with the Mohawks at Sorel also resulted in a victory for the French and their allies. For several years to come, these two victories would cool the Iroquois’s ardor for invading the St. Lawrence Valley. In two years, Champlain had accomplished a great deal. Quebec was founded, the First Nations alliance was consolidated, and the St. Lawrence Valley was secured. These were all conditions that would favor the fur trade and colonization of the territory.

Unfortunately for Champlain, a shadow was cast on these fine projects by the assassination of Henry IV on May 14, 1610. Before his death, the king had taken the fur monopoly away from Dugua de Mons.

Would everything have to start again from square one?