



# Commemorating a Transnational Hero: The 1909 Celebration of the Tercentenary of the Discovery of Lake Champlain

*In 1909, Champlain emerged as both a Canadian and an American hero, with historical significance for residents on both sides of the border. This made him a uniquely transnational figure.*

By SYLVIE BEAUDREAU

In 1909, the states of Vermont and New York held an elaborate celebration of the tercentenary of the European discovery of Lake Champlain. This was the greatest public commemoration ever to be held in the Champlain Valley and an event of national and at times international scope. The ambitious, extravagant, and costly week-long program of activities was a form of public commemoration marking the importance of Samuel de Champlain to the founding of the United States of America. Its legacy was to firmly establish Samuel de Champlain as a fully American national hero.

At first glance, there may seem to be nothing unusual about this. In 1908 Canadians celebrated the three hundredth anniversary of Champlain's founding of the City of Quebec, and indeed of New France and ultimately of Canada itself.<sup>1</sup> It seems natural, then, that the Quebec Champlain tercentenary took on the importance that it did, because

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Champlain can truly be considered the “father” of New France and Canada. But how, in 1909, did Americans regard Champlain? How did they commemorate him, and what aspects of his legacy were retained? How, indeed, and why did Champlain emerge at this time as a figure with historical resonance for the people of America? In 1909, Champlain emerged as both a Canadian and an American hero, with historical significance for residents on both sides of the border. This made him a uniquely transnational figure.<sup>2</sup> To some degree, it is possible to compare the 1908 Quebec tercentenary with the 1909 New York/Vermont celebrations, and to reflect on to what degree these commemorative events shared similar goals. Most importantly, the Champlain Tercentenary took place at a time when a number of changes were occurring in American society that allowed for this founder of Canada to take his place among the pantheon of American heroes.<sup>3</sup>

The bi-state tercentenary of the discovery of Lake Champlain was an event that has left us with an important legacy. First of all, the week-long celebrations were held throughout the Lake Champlain region, in places like Crown Point, Fort Ticonderoga, Plattsburgh, on the New York side of the lake, and at Swanton, Isle La Motte, Vergennes, and Burlington, on the Vermont side. The historical sources for this celebration, mainly in the form of newspaper and magazine articles and ephemera, are quite rich. At the end of the festivities, the commissions of both states published lavish commemorative volumes, whose role would be to perpetuate throughout time the importance of this event for future generations.<sup>4</sup> The Champlain Tercentenary also provided the occasion for the erection of permanent markers—of statues and memorials—throughout the Champlain Valley. The new interest in Champlain as an American hero can also be gauged by the number of publications emerging around these years that deal particularly with his importance to United States history. Finally, the New York commissioner, having a more generous budget, put a man named L. E. Shattuck in charge of publicity for the Champlain Tercentenary. Shattuck collected clippings dealing with the event that he pasted into two enormous, luxurious scrap books that constitute a kind of monument to the international attention that the celebrations had received. There was an educational component to the commemoration as well. Thus the historian has a rich record from which to cull facts and information, and from which to derive some sense of the significance of this popular remembrance of the man who gave his name to this region of North America. It is important to note that when piecing together the historical record, the Lake Champlain tercentenary presents a more ambitious scope than the Quebec one. This is due to the fact that the Quebec celebrations took place

in the City of Quebec itself. The American celebrations took place throughout the Champlain Valley, and the number of locations presents the historian with many different celebrations, all of which had common elements, but each of which also presented some significant local differences. Thus the American celebrations were in some ways larger and more diffuse, making attempts to define their essential nature somewhat more daunting.

To begin with, the Champlain Tercentenary exemplifies the kind of commemorative event that Michael Kammen tells us became typical of America in the Progressive era. In the introduction to his monumental study, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, Kammen tells an anecdote about how Swedish immigrants to America developed an expression to describe what the United States meant to them: they called it *framtidstlandet*, or land of the future. Using this expression as a starting point, Kammen then asks, when exactly did America go from being a land of the future to a land of the past? When did Americans begin to “invent” tradition?<sup>5</sup> In this case, I would argue that residents of Vermont and New York State had always been vaguely aware that the Champlain Valley was rich in history, but it was during the tercentenary, that for the first time, a well-developed image of the region as a historical entity worthy of global attention first emerged. In essence, then, what the citizens of the valley were doing in 1909 was not merely celebrating the life of the discoverer of the lake; they were also commemorating the rich history of the lake itself, the 300-year period beginning with Champlain’s arrival in 1609, through French occupation, British conquest, American rebellion, down to the War of 1812. The tercentenary events allowed for a historical “production” of the region, bringing to the foreground the extent to which the valley was steeped in history. Thus, to employ Kammen’s approach, it is possible to say that what the commissioners planned and what ordinary citizens witnessed was the “invention” of a historic region: the Champlain Valley.<sup>6</sup>

This brings us to the question of what Americans were commemorating in 1909. Basically, the approaching date of 1909 gave citizens of Vermont and New York State an opportunity to reflect upon the fact that the Champlain Valley had been continuously occupied by Europeans since Champlain accompanied Huron, Algonquin, and Montagnais allies on a war party against their Iroquois enemies. This story, told by Champlain himself, and expressed in the iconic engraving produced for the publication of his magnificent *Voyages*, can be seen as deeply significant for the subsequent course of North American history. By deciding to ally himself with the enemies of the Iroquois, Champlain ensured the enmity of the latter to the French. One could argue, and it has been

argued *ad nauseum*, that Iroquois enmity to the French ultimately led to the defeat and expulsion of the French from North America. Because of this, the northern part of North America would ultimately remain British, providing the basis for Americans to eventually rebel from their Mother Country, and create a republic whose roots were Anglo-Protestant, and not Franco-Catholic. In fact, when Champlain traveled down *la rivière des Iroquois*, following a warpath into Iroquois territory, unbeknownst to him, he sealed the fate of generations to follow. This is the historic lore that so many North Americans cherish as the Champlain story for the continent.

Canadians are accustomed to the idea of Champlain as not merely an explorer, or a war-wager, but as a founder of Canada. And indeed, his many voyages to and from France, his multiple setbacks, and the persistence with which he continually returned to re-establish and fortify his small settlement at Quebec are what Canadians remember, as well as his traveling to areas of Canada previously not seen by a European. Champlain is also widely admired for producing what was at the time the best map of the Northeastern part of North America.<sup>7</sup> The fact that this map appears on the new Canadian 100 dollar bill is reflective of its significance. In fact, Samuel de Champlain belongs to the pantheon of European explorers who left their mark on Western civilization. If for no other reason, he deserved to be remembered for this.

Unlike Canadians, Americans could not truly designate Champlain as a founder of America; or at least there were no real grounds for such an assertion. Champlain made no attempt to found a settlement in either Vermont or New York State, or in any other part of the present day United States.<sup>8</sup> To understand how he could be construed in 1909 as an American hero, one must employ a more sophisticated tack that emphasizes three events and ideas. First, as the first European to visit this valley, Champlain did so at the time that Henry Hudson was traveling up the river that would ultimately bear his name. Champlain gave his name to the lake he “discovered” and drew it on his maps, as well as renaming the Iroquois river for his patron at the French court, the omnipotent Cardinal Richelieu. Second, when Champlain fired his arquebus at Iroquois chiefs, the first gunshot heard in the valley, he initiated what would subsequently serve as an important warpath in the history of North America.<sup>9</sup> By being the first to “wage war” in the valley, however modestly, Champlain represented the starting point of the military history of this important region. Thus, by discovering, mapping, and claiming this area for France, Champlain began the French occupation of the valley, to be followed by the British and then the Americans themselves. In this manner, Champlain can be construed as the originator of

the French control of the valley, a control only formally relinquished at the close of the French and Indian war. Third and more importantly, Champlain can be construed as the first European to bring “civilization,” i.e., Christianity, to the “savages.” When the commissioners of 1909 finally decided to refurbish the lighthouse at Crown Point with a statue of Champlain, the celebrants at the official ceremony dedicating the monument, held in July of 1912, ceremoniously held up a large banner upon which was inscribed “Shedding the light of civilization for three centuries.” Tying the lighthouse theme with the idea of the “light” of civilization, or Christianity, was perhaps the most telling indication of what this event meant for those who participated in its staging.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, then, the Champlain commemoration did not have as its sole purpose the celebration of the life of a great Frenchman. Indeed, what the Commissioners envisaged from the start was a celebration that would include the entire history of the Champlain Valley, with its “layered” past of French, British, and American colonizing efforts. Thus the week long celebration provided the occasion for each part of the valley to bring to the fore its claims to historic importance. The reconstruction of Fort Ticonderoga, instigated by Stephen Hyatt Pelham Pell, was begun so that it would coincide with the Champlain Tercentenary.<sup>11</sup> A commemorative plaque was unveiled at the ruins of Fort St. Frederick at Crown Point. Later, the lighthouse was refurbished by the



*President Taft inspects the restored West Barracks of historic Fort Ticonderoga. Photo courtesy Fort Ticonderoga Historical Museum.*

commissioners to provide a permanent memorial in a location that was technically in New York, but close to the border with Vermont. The citizens of Plattsburgh, many of whom were Franco-American, organized the building of an important statue to Champlain that rivals the one constructed in 1898 in Quebec City. Even earlier, the Franco-American citizens of the eponymous borderline village of Champlain, New York, erected a statue of their own on the grounds of their national parish. And on the Vermont side of the Lake, monuments and historical markers were unveiled in Swanton, Vergennes, Isle La Motte and at the University of Vermont. Thus, it is possible to argue that the Champlain Tercentenary provided the opportunity for communities to “historicize” their location—to bring to the foreground the significant events of their past. This resulted in the situating of a number of impressive new monuments which, when taken together, provided a physical reminder of the important historical events that took place in the valley. One of the lasting legacies of the 1909 commission’s efforts, then, was to have either created, or have caused to be created, a number of permanent monuments in the valley. This made visible, arguably for the first time, a landscape of memory.

More importantly, perhaps, this frenzy for the creation of permanent markers had the effect of “construing” the valley as a prime destination for heritage tourism. It is clear that the organizers of the tercentenary were aware of the potential economic rewards for such investments. From this moment on, we see the appearance of maps and brochures advertising not only the romance of the history of the Champlain Valley, but of the possibility of now visiting not only the sites where history was made, but of viewing the impressive monuments and markers whose existence now clarified and made accessible the significance of what one was visiting. The monuments themselves were designed to create a feeling of the picturesque and the sublime. Interminable debates were held during which citizens argued over the most suitable location, and the most potentially picturesque placement of these monuments, the most important of which was the one at Crown Point.<sup>12</sup> During the celebration itself, the Automobile Club of America, a novel organization dedicated to promoting the interests of a new breed of automobilists, decided to produce a special map for its members which indicated exactly how one could “motor” from New York City all the way through the Champlain Valley. We perhaps need reminding that in 1909 there were few paved roads, and no interstate highways, so such a map would have been a valuable article.<sup>13</sup> The ACA made sure that the map also indicated the historic points of interest that the motorists would have access to by employing the routes suggested. This map, one could argue,



*The Champlain Memorial at Crown Point, New York was a remodeled lighthouse upon which figured a statue of Samuel de Champlain. Photo courtesy of the Feinberg Library Special Collections, Plattsburgh State University.*

shows how for the first time the valley's potential for heritage tourism was being highlighted for the new era of the automobile. Such efforts continued through the 1959 celebrations of the 350th anniversary of the lake, which produced a colorful heritage map for the automobilists who had now become a mass phenomenon, rather than the elitist pursuit it

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*The Lozier, a luxury automobile produced in Plattsburgh, was used in the tercentenary celebrations. Automobiling was still a pastime for the rich in 1909. Photo courtesy of the Feinberg Library Special Collections, Plattsburgh State University.*

had been in the early twentieth century. Such maps would urge motorists to go on a voyage of “discovery” of the Lake just as Champlain had done three hundred and fifty years ago. And it is worth noting that such efforts to promote heritage tourism in the Lake Champlain region are ongoing, the most recent initiative being the international *Lakes to Locks Passage* program.<sup>14</sup> At the close of the 1909 celebration, the *Burlington Free Press* could claim that the Lake Champlain Valley was the “Most Delightful Region of Eastern America.”<sup>15</sup>

The city of Plattsburgh’s efforts to create a permanent monument to Champlain offer us an instructive example of this process of creating what we would call today “infrastructure improvements.” Plattsburgh, New York, situated on the shores of Lake Champlain, about thirty kilometers south of the Canadian border, was and remains the largest community on the New York side of Lake Champlain. Its location across the lake from Burlington—the largest city of Vermont—makes Plattsburgh a kind of twin city as well. Both Plattsburgh and Burlington, by virtue of their being relatively large population centers, and having significant Franco-American communities, celebrated the Champlain tercentenary with lavish week-long festivities that included military displays, street

parades, commemorative religious ceremonies, formal dinners, public fireworks spectacles, torpedo boat races, and a pageant consisting of an Indian play, *Hiawatha*, enacted on a specially constructed floating island. Each participating community had been designated a special day of the week for President Taft's visit. But Plattsburgh, New York, could not claim any special connection to Champlain, who had neither landed there nor done anything within the region. And yet, following the Tercentenary, a prestigious New York City architecture firm designed and erected a statue of Samuel de Champlain which is as imposing as that built in Quebec City, a community which was not only larger than Plattsburgh, but could legitimately claim Champlain as their illustrious founder. Why did the citizens of Plattsburgh decide to erect such a glorious statue to Champlain? The answer may lie simply in the fact that being situated on Lake Champlain, the citizens of Plattsburgh wanted to build a permanent memorial to the discoverer of the Lake. In this case, the location of the statue, on historic Cumberland Avenue at the mouth of the Saranac River, may provide some clues. Champlain stands not facing the city itself, as is the case in Quebec, but facing the lake. And if you gaze in the same direction that the statue of Champlain apparently does, you will see a magnificent view of the lake with the Green Mountains of Vermont on the horizon. The placement of the statue seems to force the viewer to contemplate the beauty of the lake much as Champlain would have. What the viewer sees is what Champlain might have seen, and this provides one with some stirring thoughts about what it must have been like to be the first European to gaze upon such a sublime view.

At the same time, building the imposing statue of Champlain provided a new tourist attraction to draw visitors to Plattsburgh. The statue itself was a way for the community of Plattsburgh to "claim" Champlain as one of their own. It also gave citizens a place to promenade on weekends and evenings, and to picnic and pose for photographs. The Champlain statue became a symbol of Plattsburgh itself, and this symbolic element was reinforced through the production and distribution of penny postcards, as well as in the pictorial representation of the city. In the same way as visitors to New York City might pose next to the Statue of Liberty as a way of saying "I visited the important sites of New York," visitors to Plattsburgh could pose next to the statue of Champlain as a way of saying "I visited the important sites of the Lake Champlain Valley." So the statue of Champlain joined other attractions, such as the McDonough Monument, the Kent DeLord house, and the tombs of important War of 1812 heroes, to become a permanent addition to the historic tourism potential of the city. Thus Champlain, though not a



*Dedication of the Plattsburgh Champlain monument, July 6, 1912. Photo courtesy of the Feinberg Library Special Collections, Plattsburgh State University.*

founder of Plattsburgh, is the discoverer of the Lake; and Plattsburgh, as the largest city on the New York side of the lake, could claim him as one of their own.<sup>16</sup>

But there is perhaps another, more subtle reason for the magnificent memorial Plattsburgh put in place for Champlain. Situated so close to the Canadian border, this community was heavily Franco-American. According to the New York State Census of 1900, 50 percent of the citizens of Clinton County were born in Canada, a figure that underestimates the Franco-American population of the region because it doesn't include second- or third-generation Franco-Americans. Those familiar with the emigration movement of French Canadians to the United States know that this migration began in the years following the failed *Patriote* rebellions of 1837-38, and intensified in the decade of the Civil War and beyond. These migrants were fleeing the overpopulated *seigneuries* of the St. Lawrence and Richelieu valleys, and were often lured over the border by the economic opportunities offered in the logging camps, mining towns, quarries, and factories of upstate New York. These French speaking and Catholic immigrants found themselves bearing the brunt of Anglo-American nativism and anti-Catholicism that peaked in the 1850s. In the 1880s, all Franco-Americans of the Northeast had reacted to the stigma of having been described by the Massachusetts Labor

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*Plattsburgh's tercentenary parade on French Day featured floats with Franco-American themes, including, in the foreground, a replica of the Don de Dieu. Photo courtesy of the State of New York's Champlain Tercentenary Report.*

Commission as “The Chinese of the East.” The French Canadian emigrant population of Plattsburgh, like their homologues elsewhere south of the border, responded to the prejudice of the Yankees and the assimilationist forces of American society by forming strong so-called “national” parishes that formed the physical and spiritual center of their communities. Plattsburgh had one such strong Little Canada in the neighborhood surrounding St. Pierre de Plattsburgh. Plattsburgh’s Little Canada has streets with names like Champlain, Montcalm, and Lafayette, suggesting the pride taken in Franco-American heroes.

By the turn of the century the French Canadian emigrant communities had become so numerically important in the Northeast—often forming the majority of the population of many industrial cities—that a new name had emerged to designate them: Franco-Americans. This designation is somewhat ambiguous, but it alerts us to the fact that these new Americans saw themselves not as impoverished emigrants who had fled the miseries of overpopulated former *seigneuries* of the St. Lawrence Valley. Nor did they see themselves necessarily as forming a part of the industrial proletariat that provided the necessary man (and woman) power for the textile factories of the Northeast. By designating themselves as Franco-Americans this emigrant group could distinguish

itself from other newcomers by claiming that they were not mere immigrants, coming to America from across the Atlantic—from places like Ireland, Poland, or Greece. They could claim that as descendants of the French in North America, they were true Americans.<sup>17</sup> And this is where Samuel de Champlain comes into the picture. For Franco-Americans of Plattsburgh and Burlington, the tercentenary of the discovery of Lake Champlain by a Frenchman was a potent reminder that the French were amongst the European discoverers of America and had been present in this region since 1609. This gave the Franco-Americans their *lettres de noblesse*: their claim to a noble past, and their right at present to affirm their place as honorable Americans. Thus it comes as no surprise that the Plattsburgh celebrations should have featured a special French Day, including a French parade, planned by a French Day committee headed by Dr. Jacques LaRocque, one of the city's prominent Franco-American citizens.<sup>18</sup> The impetus to erect a monument to Champlain in Plattsburgh was strongly influenced by the presence of a vibrant Franco-American community in this town for whom Champlain was an important hero. Today, the monument is surrounded by paving stones, upon which appear the names of contributors to the fundraising recently required to refurbish the area around the statue of Champlain. Not surprisingly, the majority of contributors' names etched in the stones are Franco-American: Tremblays, Busheys, and LaBombards. This would indicate that almost one hundred years after the erection of the monument, the Franco-American families of the area still feel a special bond with Champlain.<sup>19</sup>

The Tercentenary celebration also illustrates the manifold ways in which Champlain had become an all-American hero. In 1909 he joined the pantheon of great male figures whose lives were written in such a manner as to form an object lesson in American civic virtue. It is that around this time books and articles began to appear in the United States with titles like *Samuel de Champlain: An American Hero*.<sup>20</sup> In July of 1909 *Atlantic Monthly* published an article by Charles M. Harvey entitled "Champlain as a Herald of Washington."<sup>21</sup> In such pieces Champlain was being described not as a French or a Canadian hero, but as a founder of the United States of America. Champlain was admired for his character and sterling qualities. This is linked to what historian and commentator Howard Zinn has called the idea of the United States as an "exceptionally virtuous" nation. According to this view America claims to be, in Zinn's words, "somehow endowed by Providence with unique qualities that make it morally superior to every other nation on Earth," a characterization that Zinn vigorously refutes.<sup>22</sup> Before dismissing Zinn as a left-wing crank, we should note that he is referring to an idea

with considerable legitimacy in American foreign policy circles: The notion of so-called “American exceptionalism.” Champlain was admired for his virtues—his Christian faith, his honesty, his perseverance, his bravery—and his virtues were seen as reflecting the kind of qualities that have made America great. So considerable were Champlain’s virtues that those who spoke at the tercentenary celebrations attempted to link themselves or their fellow platform dignitaries with the character of Champlain. Most often, and rather incongruously, President Taft was compared favorably to Champlain. The *Times Dispatch* of Richmond, Virginia, “Put Taft Beside (the) Great Champlain.”<sup>23</sup> Such headlines were based on the speeches made by French Ambassador Jean-Jules Jusserand in which he likened Taft’s missionary spirit to that of Champlain’s, congratulating the president for the favorable results he obtained promoting Christianity while governor of the Philippines, a Catholic colony newly acquired by the United States.<sup>24</sup> “Each Knew What It Was to Plant a Flag in a Faraway Land” was the quote from Jusserand employed as a headline by the *Philadelphia Press*.<sup>25</sup> Thus if Champlain “spread the light of Christian civilization” in the valley, Taft was lauded for “spreading the light of Christian civilization” in the Philippines. In this way, speakers attempted, however awkwardly, to draw a direct line of inheritance from Champlain to the leaders of Progressive America.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, it is possible to regard 1909 as a turning point in that Champlain becomes a transnational or a bi-national hero claimed by both Canada and the United States. Both nations used the occasion of the commemoration of his momentous life as an opportunity to declare fundamental commonalities and a joint destiny. Canadian troops came down to parade during the various local celebrations, the official dignitaries from both countries met and dined together at lavish receptions, filling their platform speeches with endless declarations of mutual admiration and Canadian-American *bonne entente*. Terse newspaper headlines cited speeches that trumpeted the tercentenary’s major accomplishment: acknowledgement that a new century of peace had dawned on the three great nations of America, France, and Great Britain. In 1909 Canada was still represented abroad by the British. Therefore, when American speakers lauded the presence of the British we can assume they included in the so-called British connection their great neighbor, Canada. Thus a typical tercentenary headline would be “Former Foes Talk Peace at Fort Ticonderoga: Representatives of Three Nations in Fraternal Meeting at Tercentenary Celebration.”<sup>27</sup> *The (New York) Sun* declared “Taft at Champlain Show: Joins With Ambassadors in Declaring for World Peace.”<sup>28</sup> Or “Welcome to the Redcoats: Coming Back to Plattsburg After a Century.”<sup>29</sup>

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*Welcome to the Redcoats: The presence of Canadian Highlanders at Plattsburgh seemed to make the point that British or Canadian troops were now welcome on American soil. Photo courtesy of Feinberg Library Special Collections, Plattsburgh State University.*

President Taft's speeches at Fort Ticonderoga, Plattsburgh, and Burlington were significant in that they interpreted the tercentenary as heralding a new era of Canadian-American peace and prosperity. Thus a final meaning of the Champlain Tercentenary was that the celebration itself appeared to usher in a new sensitivity on the part of the United States that Canada was an independent nation and a country that Americans would respect as a peaceful neighbor. The fact that Canadian troops were welcomed on American soil signified that in the near-100-year period since the end of the War of 1812, Canadian-American relations had been put right. Newspapers played upon this theme in their coverage of the festivities. An example was the *Washington Herald* headline "Canadian Highlanders Capture the Champlain Valley." The article presented the events thus:

The British redcoats again took possession of the Champlain Valley to-day, after an absence of nearly 100 years. They not only captured this city, but did it in the presence of the President of the United States. They captured all the people as well. Two regiments of Canadian troops did the trick. They were the governor general's foot

guards from Ottawa and the Fifth Royal Canadian Highlanders in kilts from Montreal, and a brave show they made of the beautiful parade ground of the United States army post. They filled the plains with bright color and the people warmed mightily to them.<sup>30</sup>

During the literary and historical exercises that accompanied the Champlain Tercentenary—forty years after Canada had been granted nationhood by the British—the American president recognized Canada as a junior neighbor whose independence would be accepted, and indeed celebrated, as a *fait accompli*.<sup>31</sup> Given that Taft was intending to propose a reciprocity agreement with Canada, he spoke of that nation in terms meant to reassure American audiences. Reporting on the president's speech, the *Washington Herald* wrote:

He referred to the fact that Canada and the mother country were attracting our farmers out in the West, and declared it was and would be short-sighted policy to try and prevent this and look upon Canada as a competitor. He declared, with emphasis, that the prosperity of one country would also be the prosperity of the other, and asserted that the Champlain celebration was of value to all concerned and especially in the fact that it had shown the existence of neighborly affection.<sup>32</sup>

Looking ahead a few years, the nations that extended a hand of friendship in 1909—France, Great Britain, the United States, and Canada—would all eventually join together in armed conflict during the Great War, a war that—at least in theory—was to be fought to “make the world safe for democracy.” The pledge of peace between these nations, one could argue, was solemnized during the bi-state Champlain celebration of 1909. Champlain, a son of France, an explorer of northeastern America, a founder of Canada that was a former colony of Great Britain, could be claimed as a favored son of all these countries. In his concluding remarks, before returning to Washington to take up the matters pertaining to tariff, President Taft remarked:

My friends, this is a most unique and many-sided memorial. I know there has run through your minds, as there has through mine this morning, the happy feeling of being present to hear such beautiful speeches from the heart as we have heard. We meet to celebrate an event and a man on whose life and on the acts of whose life turned, in a way which he little expected, the whole settlement of this country. We meet here to celebrate his virtues and to congratulate France, his country, as one that could produce such a hero.

But the feature of this memorial that I think is so unique is the gathering here in amity, in peace, and in a union that can not be torn apart, three great powers, England, France and the United States, and with England's fairest daughter, the Dominion of Canada. I ask where in all the history of memorials can you find one that in that respect will match this?<sup>33</sup>

Finally, the question of Champlain's trans-border appeal, and indeed his international interest, lay in the geographical situation of the lake that came to bear his name. The fact that this lake was one of North America's most important historical warpaths meant that aboriginal groups, the French, British, and finally Americans could all claim to have a "stake" in the history of this region. The Champlain Tercentenary was about commemorating this layered vision of the past. The United States's version of the tercentenary was jointly celebrated by the states of Vermont and New York because neither could claim him exclusively. Champlain had to be "shared," so to speak. Important lay and religious dignitaries from America participated in the celebrations, as a way of attesting not just to the French or Canadian elements to the Champlain story. Even today Lake Champlain is an international waterway, straddling not only the border between the states of New York and Vermont, but also the transnational border of Canada and the United States. With its northern end in Canada, forming Missisquoi Bay, along which is the faded historic resort of Venise-en-Québec, the lake itself is now transnational, prompting the creation of such projects as the recent *Lakes to Locks Passage* initiative, a tripartite program involving New York State, Vermont, and Québec. By discovering a lake that the vicissitudes of history would place between two countries, Champlain was destined to become a transnational hero whose legacy could be claimed by both Canada and the United States.

Ultimately, the real star of the Champlain Tercentenary was the lake itself. As David Glassberg put it in his study of American historical pageantry, "the place is the hero."<sup>34</sup> Aside from celebrating its natural beauties, the guardians of tradition wished to commemorate every important event that had taken place on its waters, or along its shores. Thus, the early seventeenth century engraving of Champlain firing his arquebus at advancing Mohawk could be followed by the story of Montcalm's great victory at Carillon, Burgoyne's later triumph there for the British, Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys taking Fort Ticonderoga without firing a shot, Arnold's stunning achievement at Valcour, and Macdonough's decisive defeat of the British in Plattsburgh Bay. Now that the lake was firmly and forever in American hands, it was possible, using a kind of Social Darwinism popular during the Progressive age, to argue that American history had a kind of exceptionalist teleology about it.<sup>35</sup> The French had vanquished the Iroquois, only to have been defeated by the British, who were in turn decisively overtaken by the American patriots. The American guardians of tradition congratulated themselves that in each case, the superior civilization



*One of innumerable iconic images of Ethan Allen's triumph at Ticonderoga. Engraving from a painting by Alonzo Chappel. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, ARC identifier 531003, [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)*

had carried the day over the inferior one.<sup>36</sup> As strange as it may seem, Champlain's victory against the Iroquois was likened to Ethan Allen's startling triumph at Fort Ticonderoga almost one hundred fifty years later. Each of these victories was immortalized by iconic images that presented a more or less true picture of what had actually happened. But verisimilitude was not that important. What mattered was that Americans learn the lesson that control of the lake was somehow historically pre-determined. At the same time, the stories and the images served as a reminder that important events that had shaped the nation had taken place on this magnificent lake.

Lake Champlain is often referred to as "America's most historic lake." It is in 1909 that it got that designation. And thanks to the monument building that resulted in the creation of a permanent landscape of memory, Lake Champlain became a place not *in* history, but *of* history. By pledging themselves to peace the orators at the Champlain celebrations signaled that the glory years of war-waging in the valley were well and truly over, and that the future role of the lake would be mainly economic and touristic. Heritage and recreational tourism would replace

the military, agricultural, and industrial role that the Champlain Valley had played in the its first three hundred years of European-American–Native American history.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Quebec tercentenary has been admirably analysed in H. V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). See also Ron Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878–1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 2003).

<sup>2</sup>Rising American interest in Champlain can be gauged by the flurry of publications from American editing houses in these years. *The Voyages of Samuel de Champlain, 1604–1618*, translated by William Lawson Grant, was published in New York by Scribner's Sons in 1907, in time for the tercentenary.

<sup>3</sup>For a recent treatment of the interconnections between memory, commemoration, and heroism in Canadian history, see Colin M. Coates and Cecelia L. Morgan, *Heroines and History: Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). For an enlightening essay on the use of heroes and heroines in the teaching of history in America, see Peter H. Gibbon, "Heroes for Our Age: How Heroes Can Elevate Students' Lives," *American Educator*, Winter 2002. According to Gibbon's typology, Champlain would be both "the warrior hero," and a "reluctant warrior."

<sup>4</sup>Lake Champlain Tercentenary Commission of Vermont. *The Tercentenary of the Discovery of Lake Champlain and Vermont. A Report to the General Assembly of the State of Vermont* (Montpelier, Vt.: Capital City Press, 1910); State of New York, *The Champlain Tercentenary Report. Report of the New York Lake Champlain Tercentenary Commission*. Henry Wayland Hill, ed. (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1911); State of New York, *The Champlain Tercentenary Report. Report of the New York Lake Champlain Tercentenary Commission*. Henry Wayland Hill, ed. (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1912).

<sup>5</sup>Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 7. Aside from Kammen, theoretical works that have influenced my thinking on this subject have been Aletta Biersack, "Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond," in *The New Cultural History*. Lynn Hunt, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); David Middleton and Derek Edwards, *Collective Remembering* (London: Sage Publications, 1990); James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); John R. Gillis' introductory essay to *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, John R. Gillis, ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press: 1994); Alon Confina, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review*, 102, no. 5 (December 1997): 1386–1403.

<sup>6</sup>The Champlain Valley became, to employ the compelling expression used by Pierre Nora for the series of volumes he edited, a "lieux de mémoire." *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Pierre Nora, ed., 7 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–92).

<sup>7</sup>Conrad E. Heidenreich and Edward H. Dahl, "Samuel de Champlain's Cartography," *Champlain: The Birth of French America*. Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois, eds. (Sillery, QC: Les Éditions du Septentrion, 2004), 312–32.

<sup>8</sup>Interestingly, the locality of Isle La Motte could claim that Champlain stopped there on his way to fight the Iroquois, making him the first Frenchman to set foot on an island that had subsequent French occupation at Fort St. Anne. It was at Isle La Motte that some narrative of continuous French occupation could be created. But unlike Quebec, Isle La Motte never evolved into a place of administrative importance, and thus Champlain's legacy for the United States would be that of an explorer and warrior, but not of a colonizer.

<sup>9</sup>Ian Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup>See Marcel Trudel's biography of Champlain in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Ramsay Cook, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), online version available at <http://www.biographi.ca/EN>; Joe C. W. Armstrong, *Champlain* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1957); *Champlain: The Birth of French America*. Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois, eds. Trans. Käthe Roth (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004). For the most comprehensive treatment of Champlain's life see David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain's Dream* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

<sup>11</sup>"Ticonderoga's Part in the Champlain Tercentenary"; "The Restoration of Old Fort Ticonderoga," *Ticonderoga Sentinel* (15 April 1909): 1 (Northern New York Historical Newspapers, <http://news.nynln.net>, henceforth NNYHN); "To Restore Old Fort: Ticonderoga to Be Re-Built for Mrs.

Pell," *New York Tribune* (22 April 1909): 1. The headline of this article states that Ticonderoga is to be rebuilt "in anticipation of Champlain Tercentenary." The process would take up to ten years, and the west barracks were to be restored first. (The *New York Tribune* was consulted online via the National Digital Newspaper Program, at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>. Henceforth the citations of such digitized newspaper articles will be designated by the acronym NDNP.)

<sup>12</sup>The choice of the site of Crown Point for a joint Vermont and New York State monument to Champlain was made as a compromise between the two state commissions. The factors leading to the decision are described in Lake Champlain Tercentenary Commission of Vermont, *The Tercentenary of the Discovery of Lake Champlain and Vermont*, 154–55.

<sup>13</sup>In *The Geography of Nowhere*, author James Howard Kunstler writes that "Roads all over the United States were quite bad at the turn of the century." See *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1994), 88.

<sup>14</sup>The Lakes to Locks Passage runs along the Upper Hudson River, Champlain Canal, and Lake Champlain. See [www.lakestolocks.com](http://www.lakestolocks.com). According to *New York by Rail 2005*, "The Lakes to Locks Passage is New York State's only nationally designated All American Road—the best of the best' among Scenic Byways across the country. All American Roads hold national significance and are destinations unto themselves." See *New York By Rail 2005* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Martinelli-Slocum Publishing, 2005), 37.

<sup>15</sup>*Travel Magazine's* July 1909 issue was a special Champlain Tercentenary Souvenir Number. See also "The Celebration, What It Means," in the *Plattsburgh Republican*, 26 June 1909 (NNYHN).

<sup>16</sup>"Monument's Natal Day. Impressive Ceremonies and Eloquent Eulogies of Great Explorer of the North." *Plattsburgh Evening Star*, 8 July 1912, 1, 8. "Unveil Champlain Statue: Dix Accepts It for the State and Entrusts It to Plattsburg." *New York Times*, 7 July 1912, C12. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers, henceforth PQHN).

<sup>17</sup>See Sylvie Beaudreau and Yves Frenette, "Historiographie et identité collective en Amérique française: le cas des élites francophones de la Nouvelle-Angleterre, 1872–1991," in *Identités et cultures nationales: L'Amérique française en mutation*. Simon Langlois, ed. (Sainte-Foy, QC: Presses de l'université Laval, 1995).

<sup>18</sup>"Plans for French Day: Arrangements for Great Parade Now Maturing." *Plattsburgh Sentinel*, 19 March 1909, First Section: 3 (NNYHN). Burlington also had its special "French Day." See Lake Champlain Tercentenary Commission of Vermont, *The Tercentenary of the Discovery of Lake Champlain and Vermont*, 83–85.

<sup>19</sup>Coates and Morgan make similar connections between the heroism of Madeleine de Verchères, who could be seen as a heroine to all French-speaking Canadians, even those living south of the 45th parallel. Whereas these authors see the Verchères legend and its promotion as a method of emphasizing their ethnic distinctiveness, I emphasize how the Champlain legend fosters cultural assimilation. See Coates and Morgan, *Heroines and History*, 62.

<sup>20</sup>The earliest treatment of Champlain published for a mainstream American audience is, not surprisingly, contained in Francis Parkman's *Pioneers of France in the New World* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1897). As the title indicates, Parkman does not consider Champlain an American hero. An earlier and lesser-known work by Parkman is his *Champlain and His Associates: An Account of Early French Adventure in North America* (New York: Maynard, Merrill, 1890). The first treatment of Champlain as an explicitly American hero is contained in John Okane Murray, *Lives of the Catholic Heroes and Heroines of America* (New York: James Sheehy, 1880). It is no coincidence that the acceptance of Champlain as an American hero is related to the increasing tolerance of Catholicism in the United States. As Catholics became numerically an important force in American society, it became culturally desirable to create a pantheon of Catholic heroes, amongst whom Champlain figured prominently. See also, Anna Theresa Sadlier, *Names that Live in Catholic Hearts: Memoirs of Cardinal Ximenes, Michael Angelo, Samuel de Champlain, Archbishop Plunkett, Charles Carroll, Henri de Larochejacquelein, Simon de Montfort* (New York: Benziger, 1882).

<sup>21</sup>Charles M. Harvey, "Champlain as a Herald of Washington," *Atlantic Monthly*, 104:1 (July 1909): 1–12. Harvey sees Champlain as the first of many intrepid French explorers who facilitated the spread of European civilization across much of the continent, a process that was to culminate in American democracy. The French defeated the Mohawks in 1609 just as the Americans ultimately defeated the British in the Revolutionary War, each victory significantly shaping the future of North America. Harvey can thus conclude "Champlain links his name with Washington's" (12). Harvey lists Champlain amongst the great Frenchmen in American history, a list that includes Rochambeau, Lafayette, and De Grasse.

<sup>22</sup>See Howard Zinn, "Lessons of Iraq War Start with US History," *The Progressive*, 70, no. 4 April 2006 (online version: [http://progressive.org/mag\\_zinn0406](http://progressive.org/mag_zinn0406)).

<sup>23</sup>"Put Taft Beside Great Champlain." *The Times Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 8 July 1909 (NDNP).

<sup>24</sup>See remarks of Ambassador Jean-Jules Jusserand, Hill, ed., *The Champlain Tercentenary Report*, 202. For a summary of the European missionary efforts in the Philippine Islands, see Philip M. Finegan, "The Philippine Islands," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, XII (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907). Online edition, 2000: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12010a.htm>.

<sup>25</sup>"Speakers Link Taft's Name with That of Champlain," *Philadelphia Press*, 6 July 1909 (NDNP). Found in *Lake Champlain Tercentenary Celebration. July 4, 1909. Presented to the State of New York by the New York State Tercentenary Commission*. Compiled by L. E. Shattuck, press representative (S.I.: 1909), Folio Vol. II: 202. Manuscripts and Special Collections. New York State Archives. Jusserand's comments were also faithfully reported in the Commission's official report. See *Champlain Tercentenary Report of the New York Lake Champlain Tercentenary Commission*, 202.

<sup>26</sup>For the best analysis of the Progressive movement see Richard Hofstadter's classic text, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Knopf, 1955). For a recent treatment of Progressive America, see the relevant chapters of M. J. Heale, *Twentieth Century America: Politics and Power in the United States 1900–2000* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup>"Former Foes Talk Peace at Fort Ticonderoga: Representatives of Three Nations in Fraternal Meeting at Tercentenary Celebration," *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, 8 July 1909: 1 (NNYNP). See "Peace at Champlain," *New York Times*, 8 July 1909: 6 (QJHN). The *Times* offered less optimistic appraisal about the prospects of peace, noting "It would be venturesome to maintain that like ambitions have ceased to exist among the nations. There are too many obvious facts to support the opposite belief." It noted that in the early twentieth century "war has become a far more costly and perilous matter than it was when WOLFE and MONTCALM, BRADDOCK and ARNOLD successively waged their conflicts along Lake Champlain and the St. Lawrence."

<sup>28</sup>"Taft at Champlain Show: Joins With Ambassadors in Declaring for World Peace." *The (New York) Sun*, 7 July 1909: 1 (NDNP).

<sup>29</sup>"Welcome to the Redcoats: Coming Back to Plattsburg After a Century," *The (New York) Sun*, 8 July, 1909: 1 (NDNP).

<sup>30</sup>"Taft Reviews British Troops: Celebration at Plattsburgh Reaches Its Climax," *Washington Herald*, 8 July 1909: 1 (NDNP).

<sup>31</sup>"Friends Forever Taft Watchword: Executive Hopes for American-Canadian Harmony," *Washington Herald*, 9 July 1909: 1 (NDNP).

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.* This was taking place at a time when the president was considering the idea of reciprocity between Canada and the United States. The Taft administration signed a free trade agreement with Canada, but the Laurier government, which supported it, was defeated in 1911. In light of the success of today's NAFTA accord, Taft's ideas about the complementarity of the two North American economies seem prescient.

<sup>33</sup>"Three Nations in Permanent Amity: President Taft Congratulates Great Britain, France and the United States," *San Francisco Call*, 9 July 1909: 3 (NDNP).

<sup>34</sup>David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 71–101.

<sup>35</sup>In his speech at the Vergennes Tercentenary celebration, John Barrett, director of the International Bureau of American Republics, discussed how well the United States was prepared for "a struggle of the survival of the fittest among the nations of the world." Lake Champlain Tercentenary Commission of Vermont, *The Tercentenary of the Discovery of Lake Champlain and Vermont*, 35.

<sup>36</sup>See quote from *The Montreal Star* at the back of the Vermont Tercentenary Commission's report.