

## **Background to the Drawings: New France (Jefferys)**

The First Nations peoples were a valuable source of information about the local geography and landscape for early European explorers and settlers. First Nations accepted Europeans into their trading networks by providing trade goods and often food and transportation. Europeans likewise included First Nations into their networks of international trade by exchanging the furs that First Nations people trapped for metal goods, guns, beads (thought to have spiritual value) and other decorative objects. Europeans who went out to trade with First Nations had a lot to learn about North America conditions and often chose to adopt First Nations ways of life, including taking a First Nations wife (usually “in the custom of the country” without Christian marriage ceremonies). Trading dominated relations among First Nations, with both British and French fur traders competing for their assistance in their work. The English and French provided the Iroquois and Huron with guns and ammunition to gain control of increased trade; wars and other conflicts increased as a result. Disease, rather than warfare, devastated First Nations populations, who had little immunity to European germs.

### **Jacques Cartier**

#### *Cartier meets the Indians of the St. Lawrence, 1535*

Jacques Cartier left France for America in 1534. After surveying Labrador, which he described as “the land that God gave Cain,” he explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence. At a spot on Gaspé, he raised a 30-foot cross and claimed possession of the land in the name of the King of France. On returning to France, he took two sons of the Chief Donnacona at Stadacona (the future site of Quebec). The two sons survived the voyage and returned with him the following year. Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence to Quebec, returning the two sons to Donnacona, then travelling as far as Hochelage (the future site of Montreal). He found a larger, more prosperous society there. When Cartier returned to Stadacona to winter, trouble arose between the two cultures due, in part, to Cartier’s failure to recognize Donnacona’s rights to his land. Cartier built a fort in the area despite Donnacona’s protests. Although Donnacona gave considerable help to Cartier’s men throughout the winter—helping them to survive both the cold temperatures and the scurvy that killed off some of the men—Cartier’s attitude remained hostile. He kidnapped Donnacona and (again) his two sons, as well as seven other members of their band. All the hostages died. In his third journey, 1541, Cartier brought with him the foundations of a French colony—settlers, animals and the tools for construction and agriculture. Fifty of the settlers died from scurvy over the winter, and another 35 were killed by First Nations peoples hostile to Cartier’s attitude to their people and their lands. Cartier and the surviving settlers returned to France.

## **Samuel de Champlain**

*Samuel de Champlain trading with Natives, early 17<sup>th</sup> century*

*Champlain taking an observation with the astrolabe, on the Ottawa, 1613*

Samuel de Champlain arrived at the St. Lawrence River in 1603, returning the next year to establish a settlement in what is now Nova Scotia. In 1608, Champlain established a trading post at Quebec, the first permanent French settlement in Canada. Once again, the winter proved too harsh, and 20 of the 28 men died in the first year. Like Cartier, Champlain believed that he was on land now claimed for France. Unlike Cartier, Champlain recognized the advantages that favourable trade relations might bring to France.

Champlain relied heavily on information obtained from First Nations peoples. In fact, he was the first European explorer to use First Nations accounts and maps in his own maps and journals, allowing him to improve the accuracy of his writing. Champlain also believed that alliances with certain First Nations would benefit him and his people, making trade for furs easier and ensuring that France would be able to establish a permanent colony in New France. In exchange for knowledge and expertise in expanding the fur trade inland, Champlain provided military assistance to the Algonquin in their conflicts with the Iroquois.

## **Etienne Brûlé and Pierre-Esprit Radisson**

*Etienne Brûlé at the mouth of the Humber, 1615*

*Radisson meets the Indians in a winter camp, 1660*

Etienne Brûlé came from France with Champlain in 1608. In 1610, he went to stay with the Hurons to learn their language. He lived and travelled among the Hurons for much of the next 20 years. He is thought to be the first European to reach all of the Great Lakes and acted as Champlain's guide and interpreter on his trips in this region. It is thought that in 1632 or 1633, he was killed and eaten by Hurons, even though cannibalism was rare among these people. At the time, the French viewed Brûlé as a traitor because he had been helping the English.

Pierre-Esprit Radisson came to New France around 1651. A year later, while out hunting, he was captured by a Mohawk band and taken to their community. He was treated kindly by his captors and was adopted by an elderly couple who had lost their son. In an effort to escape, Radisson killed three Mohawk men as they slept. He was soon caught, but he was not killed or tortured by the Mohawks because his adopted father, who was a powerful chief, got him pardoned. Radisson eventually escaped and, over the next eight years, had many adventures as he travelled, traded and fought alongside the First Nations peoples. Radisson reported, in his journal, that he made a great impression at a First Nations feast. He appeared in a colourful costume, sang and threw gunpowder in the fire, and then he handed out gifts as he spoke to the gathering. In 1660, after getting in trouble with the Governor of New France for trading without a permit, he left for Europe only to return some years later as a trader for the newly

formed Hudson's Bay Company. Radisson eventually settled in London, England and died in his seventies in 1710

For maps, drawings and additional information on each of these four explorers and on other New France adventurers, access "The Explorers" site at the Virtual Museum of New France (Canadian Museum of Civilization):  
[http://www.civilization.ca/vmnf/explor/explcd\\_e.html](http://www.civilization.ca/vmnf/explor/explcd_e.html)