

Settling Atlantic North America

DOCUMENT 2.1

SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN, "Description of the French Fur Trade"

1608

Samuel de Champlain (1574–1635) founded the French colony of Quebec in 1608. In this document, he describes the beginnings of the fur trade between the French and the native peoples of modern Canada. Although Champlain refers to himself in the third person in this document, he is its author.

Near the spot which had thus been selected for a future settlement, Champlain discovered a deposit of excellent clay, and, by way of experiment, had a quantity of it manufactured into bricks, of which he made a wall on the brink of the river. . . . In the mean time, Champlain had been followed to his rendezvous by a herd of adventurers from the maritime towns of France, who, stimulated by the freedom of the trade, had flocked after him in numbers all out of proportion to the amount of furs which they could hope to obtain from the wandering bands of savages that might chance to visit the St. Lawrence [River]. The river was lined with . . . [Frenchmen] anxiously watching the coming of the savages, all impatient and eager to secure as large a share as possible of the uncertain and meager booty for which they had crossed the Atlantic. Fifteen or twenty barques [sailing vessels with three masts] were moored along the shore, all seeking the best opportunity for the display of the worthless trinkets for which they had avariciously [greedily] hoped to obtain a valuable cargo of furs.

Samuel de Champlain, *Voyages of Samuel de Champlain: 1567–1635*, trans. Charles Pomeroy Otis, vol. 11 (Boston, MA: Prince Society, 1880), 107–108.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

Identify: How does Champlain portray the Frenchmen who join him on his journey?

Analyze: In what ways were the interests of Champlain and his fellow Frenchmen the same? In what ways were they different?

Evaluate: Compare Champlain's perceptions of natives with those of the Spanish, as seen in Documents 1.4, 1.7, and 1.8.