

Summary of Champlain College colonist association; challenges, timeline, and requested next steps.

Tina Fridgen, Principal, Champlain College – Draft June 6th, 2021

This document provides a summary and timeline of key events that are relevant to the Champlain namesake controversy at Trent University. It will highlight historical facts and outline the controversy. There have been requests for the namesake to be changed, artwork removed, and the logo of the University be altered. The Principal of Champlain College requests support moving forward, ensuring that there is public knowledge of the Universities commitment towards reconciliation.

Summary of issue and concerns:

Trent's Champlain College was named after Samuel de Champlain in 1965, when relations between English and French speaking Canadians was in turmoil. As an act of reconciliation to Quebec, founder Tom Symons named Trent's first College after Champlain. He organized the unveiling with a momentous event to bring together the Premiers of Quebec and Ontario to lay the cornerstones (one in English and one in French). The gathering of the Premiers at this event started negotiations towards establishing a program of educational and cultural exchange between the two Provinces. Now, at a time when efforts are being made to establish reconciliation with Indigenous peoples of Canada, the celebration of historical figures like Champlain, with connection to colonization, is in question.

Champlain was chosen as a namesake for Trent's College as an act of reconciliation between English and French Canada, and to recognize the history of his travels through the Peterborough region. Conversations regarding the controversy of celebrating Champlain have been happening across Canada, and since the 400th anniversary (2015) of his travels through the Kawarthas these conversations have increased at Trent. There have been two narratives of Champlain made public through the Peterborough Examiner. One a celebration of his travels, illustrating his importance to French and Indigenous culture, and connections to the region; the other questioning the appropriate nature of honouring a European colonizer.

The history of Champlain in the Kawartha's has been documented in the book "Finding Champlain's Dream" by Trent Faculty Peter Adams and Al Brunger, with local historian Elwood Jones. The book connects Champlain's success to his trade relations with Indigenous peoples who shared the knowledge of the land that was essential for trade, and aided the establishment of settlements in Canada. The book details the history of Champlain in Canada, in the Kawarthas, and the connections to Trent University.

The historical significance of Champlain establishing relationships with Indigenous leaders, who together brought growth and prosperity to our country, is celebrated across Canada but the issue is complex. His reputation cannot be separated from the future impacts of colonization and genocide of the first peoples. Respected Curve lake community member Doug Williams wrote an article in the Examiner that connected the current intergenerational traumas caused by residential schools to early colonization. He explains that Indigenous people may not celebrate Champlain, as he symbolizes the beginning of many future catastrophic events. Celebrating Champlain may also be insulting to Indigenous peoples. The term "Father of New France" implies that Champlain founded Canada, and does not give any credit to the indigenous peoples who helped him succeed.

This two sided controversy continues at Trent. The Champlain namesake, the artwork in Champlain College, and Champlain's sword in the Trent logo are part of Trent's identity. These symbols are being questioned by some students, staff, faculty and members of the Peterborough community. Since 2017 upper year Champlain students have taken the lead in drawing attention to the controversial naming of the College. In an Arthur article, Nik Taylor calls upon the University to recognize the negative impacts that the namesake can have on our reputation. He welcomes a dialogue on the topic, while making strong statements regarding the actions of Champlain's exploitation of Indigenous peoples. This article was contrasted by the views of Harvey McCue, a member of the Anishinabe First Nations, and proud Champlain Alumni, who responded to the Arthur article suggesting that Champlain should not be washed from the University. He challenged the idea that Champlain was a colonizer, and instead a French settler with good relationships with the local Migmaw or Wendat or Anishinabe of that time. (links to articles shared below).

Publicly there has been little attention paid to this issue since the articles, though between 2017 and 2020 the Principle of Champlain College has received numerous inquiries about namesake, and Champlain artwork has been vandalized on campus. With the rising of BIPOC support, the controversy surrounding the namesake of the College publicly resurfaced on social media in June 2020. In light of recent support of Indigenous rights in June 2021, Champlain College student leaders have again requested the large bronze bust located at the entrance to the Great Hall, and the portrait of Champlain in the fireside lounge, to be removed from the College. The Principal of Champlain College consulted with Marilyn Burns (VP Communications and Recruitment), Trent Historians (Michael Eamon and Christopher Dummitt) and Dawn Lavell-Harvard (Director of FPHL), and it was suggested that the creation of a working group would help advise the University on steps to move forward with respect to the various opinions from our community.

TIMELINE

1615 - Samuel de Champlain and colleagues travelled through the Kawarthas with Huron and Algonquin peoples to assist on a raid of their rivals to the south.

1965 - Tom Symons names the first college on Symons campus Champlain college.

2015 – 400 yrs since Champlain travelled through Ontario

— — — Champlain Sculpture erected in Penetanguishene, ON - "The Meeting" by artist Timothy Schmalz is located at the end of the historic walkway on McGibbon's Point. It shows Champlain and the Huron-Wendat chief of the village of Toaniché, Aenon, holding a wampum in a canoe.

— — — Declaration of Champlain Week in Peterborough Aug. 30 to Sept. 5 to celebrate 400 year anniversary

— — — Doug Williams write article in the Peterborough Examiner

<https://www.pressreader.com/canada/the-peterborough-examiner/20150908/281633894011773>

— — — Finding Champlain's Dreams – book release

<https://www.thepeterboroughexaminer.com/news/peterborough-region/2015/09/05/anniversary-of-de-champlain-s-time-here-celebrated.html?rf>

2017, July – 150th Anniversary of Confederation – Nation wide discussion on the impacts of colonization to Indigenous peoples

2017, Nov 1st – Nic Taylor, Upper Year Champlain Student, writes an Article in the Trent Arthur, Champlain's Name Shames Trent <https://www.trentarthur.ca/news/champlains-name-shames-trent>

2017, Nov 20th – Harvey McCue writes a response to the Arthur in defence of the Namesake - Reader Response: Champlain's name needs nuance, not condemnation - <https://www.trentarthur.ca/news/reader-response-champlains-name-1>

2020 – March – TCSA sent email to Champlain principal requesting removal of the bust

2020 – June – Several Champlain student leaders emailed the Principal and senior administration with requests to remove the bust from the Great Hall.

2021 – June- Facebook. Public letters to Trent President requesting a change in name

Requested next steps:

Creating a working group to advise the University and Principal of Champlain College on educational materials and review the Champlain art work displayed in Champlain College (see below). The advisory committee could have representation from FPHL, TUNA, Champlain student leaders, local Indigenous communities, historians, and representation for local Indigenous communities.

Creating educational materials: Being an academic institution there are many opportunities to create educational materials that could help to acknowledge the controversy and add context to explain the Universities commitment to reconciliation. Creation of a Champlain College website to acknowledge the namesake and the controversy surrounding it, plaques to accompany the artwork, and an educational display are all ways that we can acknowledge the complexities of the issue and clarify the universities position and commitment to reconciliation.

Annual Seminar Series – Walking together – to create space in the Champlain community to continue dialogue and learning about how our past can be used to shape our paths for moving forward together.

Champlain Art in Champlain College

Champlain College Bronze Bust - created by Jeremie Giles (donated by Connie Burton in 2004) <https://www.trentu.ca/newsarchive/pressreleases/040624champlain.html>



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Champlain Portrait – painted by Charles F. Comfort

Accession Number: 2001.089.1

Artist: **Comfort, Charles F., L.L.D., R.C.A.**

Object Type: **Painting Oil**



Place and/or Date: 1965

Portrait of Samuel de Champlain holding a quill and book. Colours used: grey, blue, yellow. No varnish, no glaze. Frame - wood in 4 sections: (1) gold coloured inner frame,(2) buff coloured bevelled edge (textured), (3) decorative edge -gold, grey and red

Current Location: Champlain College Fireside Lounge

Inscription: Signed front: Comfort 65 Plaque(front): Samuel de Champlain / c. 1567 - 1635 / painted by Charles F.Comfort LL.D., R.C.A. Signed (back): #386 e C.F. Comfort Back (label):Samuel de Champlain 1567 - 1635. This representation of the distinguished Governor

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Charles Comfort.

Legend / 1965

Charles Comfort was an Honorary Member of the Champlain College Senior Common Room. This piece is a sketch of the large mural Comfort painted in the National Library in Ottawa and it was a donation of the artist himself to Trent.

Source: Trent University Art Collection files

