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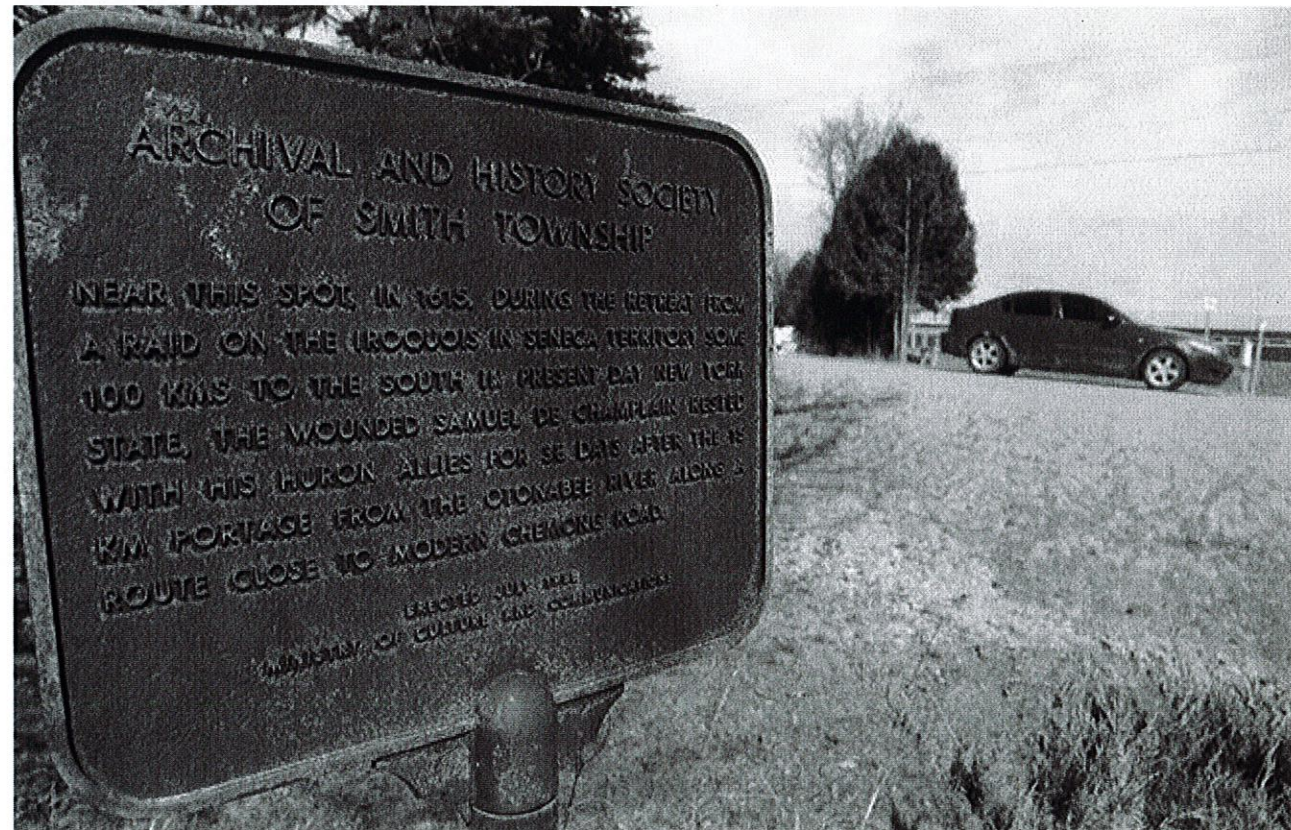



LIFE

LOCAL HISTORY

Trent and Champlain: A bond - University has paid tribute to early explorer since its founding days

By Alan Brunger & Peter Adams, Special to The Examiner
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A sign from Archival and History Society of Smith Township marks the area where French explorer Samuel de Champlain rested with his Huron Allies in Bridgenorth in 1615 on Saturday, April 4, 2015. About 400 years ago, in 1615, Champlain spent about six months in the Kawarthas. To honour this significant anniversary of Champlain's trek through the area, Trent Valley Archives is sponsoring a talk by Alan Brunger, assisted by Peter Adams and Elwood Jones at 7 pm on Thursday, April 23rd, 2015 at the Highland Park Funeral Centre on Bensfort Road. Clifford Skarstedt/Peterborough Examiner/Postmedia Network

From its earliest days, Trent University has looked beyond its immediate setting in order to embrace the cultural diversity of Ontario, and Canada in general. Founding president Tom Symons invited the Premiers of Québec and Ontario, Jean Lesage and John Robarts, to officiate at the cornerstone laying of Champlain College, the first building erected at the then new Nassau (now Symons) Campus in October 1965.

His timing was auspicious because Champlain had, in all likelihood, travelled, with hundreds of First Nations warriors, down the Otonabee River (photo), which flows past the site of this College, some 350 years before in the fall of 1615.

In his address to the large crowd President Symons welcomed Premier Lesage as "the leader of the French Canadian nation with whom we in English Canada joined long ago in a creative union". He continued by observing, "We hope that this college, built on the soil of Ontario and bearing the name of Samuel de Champlain will serve as a symbol of affirmation of this union for generations and centuries to come."

Within a short time, the students of the new college adopted the mid- winter carnival L'Ordre de Bon Temps (The Order of Good Cheer) - which Champlain had started in 1607, at his fledgling Bay of Fundy colony, in order to lift the spirits of his men during the coldest season. The three-day event continues at Trent to this day for the same reason.

The two corner tones at Champlain College, in both official languages (photo), acknowledge the role of Champlain in exploring and mapping present-day Ontario and his vision for the future of a unified Canada.

The College boasts further evidence of Champlain's role in the form of a portrait - a sketch in oil (photo) - completed in 1965 by the noted artist Charles Comfort in preparing his large mural of the "Fathers Of Canada" completed in Confederation Year, 1967, for permanent display in the foyer of the Library and Archives of Canada.

In addition, a large bronze bust of Champlain (photo) on the staircase leading the College's Great Hall is the work of the prominent sculptor, Jérémie Giles, whose two metre high statue of Champlain was completed in Ottawa in 2004.

The spirit of Champlain College emerges as well through its coat-of-arms (photo) comprising a shield, crest and motto (taken from Champlain's diary and translated as "Continue my discoveries"). The crenellated, mural crown, with fleurs-de-lys, symbolizes both the City of Québec, capital of New France, which was founded by Champlain and also the central tower of the college. The wavy lines - an element in the university coat-of-arms - evoke the waterborne journeys of Champlain, as well as the Otonabee River beside which the college stands. The compass rose recalls Champlain's role as an explorer and cartographer while its red and white represents the national heraldic colours of Canada.

The college has adopted the contemporary slogan "DARE" as the acronym for four sterling life goals attributed to its forbear - discover, adventure, reflect and engage (photo).

Apart from the most prominent link to Champlain in the form of the College in his name, Trent University established other links of this nature from its earliest days, mainly through the work of its archaeologists. During the 1970s, the Anthropology and Native Studies departments of Trent University were associated archaeological research in Huronia, home of the Huron Nation in Champlain's time, beside Georgian Bay, Ontario. Faculty and students conducted research in that region.

For example, Ken Kidd, founder chair of both Native Studies and Anthropology, formerly with the Royal Ontario Museum, is best remembered for his work on the Jesuit base of Sainte Marie Among the Hurons and the Huron Ossuary. He and his wife Martha co-published on aspects of First Nations culture. Martha was a longtime member and patron of Trent Valley Archives.

Peter Adams, emeritus professor in the Department of Geography, who accompanied the archaeologists as an expert in aerial photograph interpretation, recalls.

"Another of the Trent activities in Huronia that was a series of summer field camps where undergraduates were introduced to field archaeology and trained to assist in digs, through hands-on summer school courses. Huronia was located on large sandy areas, which were the floors of ancient glacial lakes. The Huron lived in elaborate stockaded villages, surrounded by large fields for their crops. The population of the region was in the tens of thousands.

The large number of former village sites, each with its own midden, gives the impression of an even larger population. This is because the sandy glacial soil became depleted every decade or so. The entire village and its cropped area

had to be moved at fairly regular intervals. Each village site detected today represents only a decade or so of occupation.

I attended a couple of these camps under the supervision of Paul Rexe who was a Teaching Assistant at Trent in those days, later a City Alderman in Peterborough. My family and I lived in tents and Doug Barr and I taught basic air photo interpretation. It was remarkable how much detail could be picked up from quite ordinary vertical air photos. During our air photo exercises, we found a new village site not far from the one we were investigating."

Many other Trent archaeologists have undertaken work in Huronia and other nearby regions of southern Ontario since the 1970s. The Trent Valley Archives has the Paul Rexe fonds and Trent University archives has extensive collections devoted to the Kidds.

In 2013, Prof. Tom Symons, in his role as Chairman of the Ontario Heritage Trust, presided at the reburial of members of Huron-Wendat Nations at the Thonnakonna Ossuary near Kleinburg, Ontario. In his remarks Professor Symons observed that "a greater knowledge, understanding and respect for aboriginal heritage is an essential condition for a better knowledge and understanding of Canada", a sentiment which Samuel de Champlain would have surely echoed.

Trent University has developed, in addition, largely at the urging of its founding President, the first Native (now Indigenous) Studies Programme in a Canadian University at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Results of this sort, the work of Ontario universities, provided back ground data for research cited in articles published in the Heritage Gazette of the Trent Valley in recognition of the 400th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain's visits to Peterborough. Other publications relating to the career of Samuel de Champlain as well as the early development of Ontario as part of New France cited below will be discussed in upcoming articles in the Trent Valley Archives' Heritage Gazette.

Alan Brunger is a professor of geography at Trent. Peter Adams is a professor emeritus of geography at Trent and a former MP and MPP.

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