

The Baptism Act of Samuel de Champlain

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For more than a century, the mystery surrounding the origins of the family of Samuel de Champlain aroused the interest of many historians who have attempted to learn more about the place and year of birth of the founder of Quebec City. From Charles-Honoré Laverdière, in 1870, to David Hackett Fischer, in 2008, all have speculated on his origin at Saintonge. In this article, we want to do an update on the current state of research concerning Champlain since the discovery, in 2012, of a baptismal certificate which could be attributed to the “Father of New France” according to the French genealogist Jean-Marie Germe. This document, contested by some and approved by others, gives rise to controversy in 2018.

THE SURNAME CHAMPLAIN

In numerous civil and religious acts, the name of Samuel de Champlain appears under this graph with the particle "de ". However, in the signatures of these same documents, we only find the initials “Champlain», in beautiful calligraphy. The surname and even the nickname Champlain are extremely rare in 16th century France. In several genealogical databases consulted (Généabank, Généanet, Bigenot), we only found eight Champlain surnames. The historian Éric Thierry suggests that the surname Champlain is said to have originated of a stronghold located near Saint-Pierre-des- Landes, in Mayenne, without however providing formal proof. Our research in toponyms from France teach us that this name actually exists, but in remote regions of Saintonge, Anjou and even Brittany. By contrast, there did exist a manor of the name of Champlain in Saint-Pierre-des-Landes, in 1610, which was in the entourage of the Boullé family, but that Samuel de Champlain was originally from this place is not based on any document of archives.

The first time that the name Champlain – and its spelling variants – was traced in the La Rochelle archives, it is in a notarial deed of December 23, 1573 attributed to the father of Samuel. At that moment, Antoine Chappellain, ships pilot, owned a property in the place of Jacopolis in Brouage and sold a ship to Constant Grenon, lord of Montalier, in front of Mr Vilain. He signs the act:

“On the thirteenth day of August fifteen hundred seventy four was baptized Samuel son of Anthoinne Chapeau and of mother, Marguerite Le Roy, godfather Estienne Paris, godmother Areynne Marye Rousseau. Denord N Giraud (initials). » (Departmental archives of Charente-Maritime). CAP-AUX-DIAMANTS | NO 134 | SUMMER 2018
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Anthine Chappellain.

In the acts consulted, we find variants of the surname Champlain, even if his signature is still the same. This is how in 1630, when selling houses in Brouage, we find Champelain. In other period documents, we also find Chappelain. That the surname Champlain was spelled “Chapeleau”, in 1574, is not impossible. The French genealogist Pierre Le Clercq points out that this variation in the name is probably due to inattention of the writer of the baptismal certificate. Such distortions of surnames also appear in the acts of Catholic baptisms. In addition, the surname Chapeleau was common in the 16th century and 17th centuries in western France (Charente and Vendée), unlike that of Champlain rather extremely rare. As for the name of Samuel de Champlain, it appears for the first time in 1595 while serving in the army of Brittany under the orders of Francis d’Espinay de Saint Luc. The first name of Samuel, of Hebrew origin, is widespread in the province of Saintonge in the 16th century as much for children of Catholic denomination than Protestant. Between 1500 and 1600, the “Cercle généalogique de la Saintonge” noted 31 first names Samuel in the parish registers from the 16th century.

THE PLACE AND YEAR OF BIRTH OF CHAMPLAIN Before 2008, the year of the 400th anniversary of the founding of the city of Quebec by Samuel de Champlain, most historians, on both sides of the Atlantic, agreed to affirm that he was born in Brouage between the years 1564 and 1580 based on their observations on different events of his life and that of his faithful travel companion, François Gravé Du Pont (Saint-Malo, 1560, France, after 1629). In April 2012, the discovery of a baptism act dating from 1574, at the La Rochelle Temple of Saint-Yon, by Jean-Marie Germe has relaunched debates on the location and the year of Champlain's birth. In his writings, Samuel de Champlain always claimed to be from Brouage without however mentioning his year of birth. We read in the will of his presumed uncle, Guillaume Allene, written in 1601 in Cadiz, in Spain, by the notary Marcos de Rivera: "I have a lot of affection for Samuel de Champlain, here present, French native of Brouage in the province of Saintonge. Some authors, including Jean-Marie Germe, interpreted that the term "natural" written in this act in old Spanish speaking means "originary" and not "native". The original of Allene's will is preserved at the Historical Archives of the province of Cádiz and the Archives of Andalusia in Seville, Spain. It was further translated into French. Another notable fact about his origin, in his marriage certificate contracted in Paris, in 1610, Champlain indicates to the notary that the contract must be written according to local custom the city of Brouage, not wanting to make an allusion to a property of Champlain, but to a "bourgeois inhabitant of Brouage." According to the genealogist Jean- Marie Germe, various bourgeois or officers of the garrison living in the town of Brouage had this mention "sieur of said place" as in the contract of marriage in Paris, in 1610, for Samuel de Champlain of Brouage. To date, only Éric Thierry does not seem to admit that Champlain was born in Brouage. He argues that the mention "sir of said place" in the will d'Allène, in 1601, does not explicitly mean de Brouage.

THE ACT OF BAPTISM OF CHAMPLAIN

The baptismal certificate dated August 13 1574, discovered by Jean-Marie Germe, in April 2012, in the La Rochelle archives, is undoubtedly information more realistic about the year of birth by Samuel de Champlain. Let's remember here that several historians have indicated in their publications that Champlain was probably born in early 1570s. So the year 1574 is more than credible. Samuel de Champlain was born in a region of France where the Protestant religion was strongly present. There was indeed a pastor in Brouage since 1572 with the troops in the person of Nicolas Folion known as La Vallée from La Rochelle who customarily visited the Protestant community of Brouage, but no temple existed for religious ceremonies. As in the city of La Rochelle, several pastors have followed one another since the year 1561, at the beginning at the Saint-Michel temple, then to that of Saint-Yon where the pastor Denors N. Girault officiated in 1574. That Champlain was a Protestant in the first years of his life seems admitted by several historians since Henri IV, Guillaume Allène and Pierre Dugua de Mons were also. Champlain always affirmed that he was a devout Christian. At that time, Catholics and Protestants alike were devout Christians. In the baptismal certificate of August 13 1574, entered in the temple register of Saint-Yon, we can see strong similarities in names indicated in reference to what we know of the names of Samuel's parents of Champlain cited only in his marriage contract with Hélène Boullé, who moved to Paris in 1610. The first name of the baptized person is Samuel, first name that Champlain always used during his life. As for Antoine, father of Samuel, it is the same first name than that is indicated in 1610, except that the surname is Chapeleau in place of Chapelain or Champlain. As to the name of his mother, Marguerite Le Roy, it is the same as on the act of 1574 in La Rochelle and that of 1610 in Paris. *10 CAP-AUX-DIAMANTS / NO 134 / SUMMER 2018*

So we have four elements out of five which are the same in addition to religion and the year of his birth which is between 1570 and 1680. In genealogy, these similarities suggest that this baptismal act is very probably that of Champlain himself if there still remains a tiny doubt. This is also the opinion of the eminent demographer Hubert Charbonneau who examined the act in question. We also consulted several genealogical databases to know if a Samuel, son of one named Antoine and a Marguerite Leroy or Le Roy existed in the 16th century. Our search was in vain in all provinces from the west of France. It remains to be clarified why Samuel de Champlain was baptized at La Rochelle rather than Brouage. Here, we can only assume, especially since Brouage was located more than fifty kilometers from La Rochelle. It should be mentioned that for Protestants,

it is often several days and even a few weeks from date of birth of a child and that of his baptism. This practice is corroborated by Didier Potton, professor at the University from La Rochelle and specialist in the history of Protestantism. So, travel by boat of the distance between Brouage which, let us remember, at the time, was an important seaport on the Atlantic, and La Rochelle is not impossible. Moreover, like the godfather and godmother were residents of La Rochelle, the possibility that the baptism took place in this city becomes very probable. In 1574, Étienne Paris, the godfather, a rich shipowner, was investing in racing ships. He was the sole ship-owner of the "Lion", a 70-ton ship based in La Rochelle. Etienne Paris certainly knew of Antoine Champlain, both of them working in maritime businesses. As for the godmother, Marie Rousseau, even if she was not identified, because of his surname too common at the time, it would be surprising that she is from Brouage. We can also easily assume that Guillaume Allène was present at the baptism. Unfortunately, the act is not signed by Samuel's parents, which could have provided us with further details on its veracity. For my part, I maintain, as I stated in an article from the "Quebecensia" magazine, published in 2012, that Samuel de Champlain was born in Brouage and was baptized in La Rochelle in 1574.

THE CHAMPLAIN FAMILY

Champlain was born in Brouage from a bourgeois family, which was not of noble extraction, even if we find the particle "de" attached to his name. No French noble genealogy does mention the name of Champlain as a noble surname or as a property name in France. His father was a prominent ship pilot in Brouage at the time when the sea reached the city walls. Samuel Champlain is an only son from the marriage of Antoine Champlain and Marguerite Le Roy. This assertion has been validated in the documents concerning the estate of Marguerite Le Roy, in Brouage. For this reason, no other document concerning the surname Champlain does exist in the civil and religious acts, both in Brouage and in La Rochelle. It was through his marriage, celebrated on December 30, 1610 at the church of Saint- Germain-l'Auxerrois of Paris, with Hélène Boullé, born in Paris around 1598, that Champlain's family grew. She was the daughter of Nicolas Boullé, secretary of the king's chamber, and Marguerite Alix, married before 1586. His father was from Fougères, in Brittany, while his mother was native of Paris. Hélène Boullé had brothers and sisters who, by alliance, became brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law of Samuel de Champlain. The latter, one of the greatest explorers of New France, died in Quebec on December 25, 1635. His wife, meanwhile, died on December 20, 1654 in Meaux, in the current department of Seine-et- Marne. The couple left no descendants. As we can see in this article, the Champlain family limits itself to Samuel and his parents, the reason for the rarity of the surname in France. According to my analysis of the sources consulted at this day, we can assume that Champlain was born in Brouage in the summer of 1574 and that he was baptized in La Rochelle in August 1574. Why not? Unless new research, mainly in old notarial deeds of Charente-Maritime, bring indications contrary to current knowledge.

Marcel Fournier, AIG, is a historian and genealogist. To know more : *Among the historians who have written about of the year of birth of Champlain, Narcisse-Eutrope Dionne and Marcel Trudel opt for 1570, Jean Liebel for 1574, David Hackett Fischer for 1570. It is in an article in the "Sud-Ouest" newspaper of April 14, 2012 that Jean-Marie Germe shared his research regarding the probable origin of Samuel de Champlain. The newspaper "Le Soleil de Québec" published the news in its edition of April 16, 2012 following information transmitted by Marcel Fournier. Éric Thierry, Samuel de Champlain, "Espion in America 1598-1603, Sillery", "Les éditions du Septentrion", 2013, p. 10. History blog by Pierre Dubeau. <https://pierredubeaublog.wordpress.com/2018/04/11/the-date-of-birth-desamuel-de-champlain/> Archives of Charente-Maritime, register pastoral of Saint-Yon, La Rochelle, 1574. "Bulletin of the Historical Society of Quebec", XXXI, no 1 (May 2012), p. 8.*