

'Free from all possibility of historical error' Orillia's Champlain Monument, French-English Relations, and Indigenous (Mis)Representations in Commemorative Sculpture

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Article abstract

The 1925 unveiling of the Champlain monument in Orillia capped nearly three decades of public commemoration of Samuel de Champlain's explorations in North America. Promoted tirelessly by local entrepreneur Charles Harold Hale and designed by English sculptor Vernon March, the monument was beset by controversy, construction delays and cost overruns. Nonetheless, when completed, it was initially greeted with nearly unanimous international acclaim. Two overarching themes marked the monument. First, its backers sought to use it to improve frayed relations between Ontario's anglophone and Quebec's francophone populations. Second, the monument's design misrepresented the mutually beneficial relationship between Champlain and his Huron allies and promoted Eurocentric and colonial mentalities that marginalized the Indigenous contribution to the development of New France and Canada. While the first goal was largely unrealized, the second has resonated down to the present day.

Free from all possibility of historical error'

Orillia's Champlain Monument, French-English Relations, and Indigenous (Mis)Representations in Commemorative Sculpture

by Michael D. Stevenson



On 1 July 1925, a jubilant crowd estimated at more than 10,000 persons thronged Couchiching Beach Park in the town of Orillia, Ontario, to witness the unveiling of the Samuel de Champlain monument celebrating the French explorer's visit to Huronia in 1615-1616. Designed by famed sculptor Vernon March and standing thirty-six feet in height, the monument featured a twelve-foot bronze of a swash-buckling Champlain standing atop an imposing stone pedestal, with two side bronze groupings titled "Christianity" and "Commerce" emphasizing the assumed spiritual and economic benefits

brought to Huronia's Indigenous population by Recollect friars and coureurs de bois. Representing the Dominion government, Rodolphe Lemieux, the Speaker of the House of Commons, addressed the festive audience and lauded the nation-building initiatives inaugurated by French pioneers that resonated into the twentieth century:

They planted here a new society in the principles of the purest religion; they subdued the wilderness before them; they built temples to the true God where formerly had ascended the smoke of idolatrous sacrifices; they broke the first sod where now extend fields and gardens, and stretching over the hills and valleys which had never until then

Abstract

The 1925 unveiling of the Champlain monument in Orillia capped nearly three decades of public commemoration of Samuel de Champlain's explorations in North America. Promoted tirelessly by local entrepreneur Charles Harold Hale and designed by English sculptor Vernon March, the monument was beset by controversy, construction delays and cost overruns. Nonetheless, when completed, it was initially greeted with nearly unanimous international acclaim. Two overarching themes marked the monument. First, its backers sought to use it to improve frayed relations between Ontario's anglophone and Quebec's francophone populations. Second, the monument's design misrepresented the mutually beneficial relationship between Champlain and his Huron allies and promoted Eurocentric and colonial mentalities that marginalized the Indigenous contribution to the development of New France and Canada. While the first goal was largely unrealized, the second has resonated down to the present day.

Résumé: En 1925 à Orillia, le dévoilement du monument de Champlain avait été le point culminant de commémorations publiques de l'exploration de l'Amérique du Nord par Samuel de Champlain. Promu sans relâche par l'entrepreneur local Charles Harold Hale et conçu par le sculpteur anglais Vernon March, ce monument fut proie à des controverses, des délais de construction et des dépassements de coûts. Néanmoins, une fois complété, il fut reconnu sur la scène internationale. Deux thèmes principaux caractérisaient ce monument. Premièrement, ses fondateurs voulaient l'utiliser pour améliorer les relations entre les populations anglophones de l'Ontario et francophones du Québec. Deuxièmement, la conception du monument n'avait pas bien représenté la relation mutuellement bénéfique entre Champlain et ses alliés Hurons et avançait une mentalité coloniale et eurocentrique qui minimisait la contribution indigène au développement de la Nouvelle France et du Canada. Si le premier objectif a échoué, le second en revanche résonne jusqu'à nos jours.

been reclaimed, can now be seen in the autumn, the waving of golden harvests. From the farms, the factories, the villages, the cities, the firesides scattered in Ontario and Quebec is raised the joyous murmur of wealth, agricultural, industrial, and commercial.¹

The 1925 celebration in Orillia capped nearly three decades of public commemoration recognizing Champlain's explorations in North America, with major monuments of the French voyager unveiled in Quebec City (1898), Saint John (1910), and Ottawa (1915). These tributes were also part of a broader impulse to commemorate significant events in the history of Canada and the British Empire, and the period from the 1890s to the 1930s represented the golden age of monument building and public remembrance of events such as the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897, the South African War, Quebec's tercentenary in 1908, and the First World War. The many scholarly accounts of these commemorations and monument constructions include several of the most highly regarded studies published in the fields of Canadian social and cultural history, among them H.V. Nelles' *The Art of Nation Building* and Jonathan Vance's *Death So No-*

¹ "Mr. Lemieux's Oration at the Unveiling," *Orillia Packet*, 2 July 1925.

² H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's*

ble.² Yet the Champlain monument in Orillia remains virtually ignored in this otherwise rich historiography—which also extends to cover monument building in most industrial societies³—despite its impressive cost and scale, its national and international reception, and its successful placement in a small Ontario town seemingly unsuited to host such a major commemorative marker.⁴ A comprehensive examination of the history of Orillia's Champlain monument provides critical insight into the role of local entrepreneurs in fostering civic pride, the part played by external events in dictating the pace of the monument's construction, and the long-term significance of historical memorials in fostering a distinct municipal identity in Canada during the twentieth century.

Perhaps the most illuminating issue in the examination of the Champlain monument in Orillia concerns the his-

torical representation of Indigenous populations. These representations have frequently portrayed First Nations in a subservient or diminished role. Vivien Green Fryd, for example, describes the Native American in Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe* as combining "masculine power with feminine weakness, underscoring both his strength and his subservience to British power. By rendering the Indian as naked and vulnerable in his seated pose, West diminished his threat and placed him in a secondary position, as a tributary to the British forces during the French and Indian War."⁵ Artists and sculptors themselves frequently emphasized their intent to denigrate Indigenous peoples in their work. In his written interpretation of the Canadian Nurses' Association War Memorial in Ottawa unveiled in 1926, for example, sculptor George William Hill described the "noble sisters" who

Tercentenary (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), and Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997). See also James Opp and John C. Walsh, eds., *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Phillip Buckner and John G. Reid, eds., *Remembering 1759: The Conquest of Canada in Historical Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Cecilia Morgan, *Creating Colonial Pasts: History, Memory, and Commemoration in Southern Ontario, 1860-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); and Greg Marquis, "Celebrating Champlain in the Loyalist City: Saint John, 1904-10," *Acadiensis*, 33:2 (2004), 27-43.

³ See David Gobel and Daves Rossell, eds., *Commemoration in America: Essays on Monuments, Memorialization, and Memory* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013); Rachel Tsang and Eric Taylor Woods, eds., *The Cultural Politics of Nationalism and Nation-Building* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Stefan Berger and Bill Niven, eds., *Writing the History of Memory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin, eds., *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁴ For a concise overview of Champlain memorial monuments, see Patrice Groulx, "In the Shoes of Samuel de Champlain," in Raymone Litalien and Denis Vaugeois, eds., *Champlain: The Birth of French America* [translated by Käthe Roth] (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 335-45. Groulx's description of the Champlain monument in Orillia covers two pages.

⁵ Vivien Green Fryd, "Rereading the Indian in Benjamin West's 'Death of General Wolfe,'" *American Art*, 9:1 (1995), 84.

“came to a land of savages to help the sick and needy.” Beside the nun on the right of his chiseled panel, Hill noted, “are standing the dreaded and treacherous Iroquois, who, suspicious and ignorant, were ever ready to return evil for good.”⁶ These commonly-expressed sentiments proved important in the design of the Champlain monument in Orillia, where the celebration, according to the monument’s plaque inscription, of the “advent into Ontario of the white race” and the desire to strengthen ties between English and French Canada trumped any possible intention to portray Champlain’s complex interaction with Huronia’s Indigenous population in an equitable and historically accurate manner.

The Commissioning of the Champlain Monument

Orillia developed a dynamic commercial and manufacturing economy by the start of the First World War, with the provision of hydroelectric power to the town and the development of a regional railway system in the late nine-

teenth century allowing Orillia—with a population of 6,828 residents in 1911—to become the primary industrial centre in Ontario north of Toronto.⁷ Between 1901 and 1911, the number of factories in the town increased from twenty-nine to forty, and the value of goods produced swelled from \$1.2 million to \$4.6 million in the three-year period before 1912 alone. Energetic entrepreneurs and civic promoters imbued with the “Orillia Spirit” orchestrated this growth, chief among them James Tudhope and Charles Harold Hale. After forming the Tudhope Carriage Company in 1897, Tudhope unveiled his first line of automobiles in 1907, and he then formed the Tudhope Motor Company in 1909 and produced the Tudhope-Everitt, a four-cylinder vehicle almost completely engineered and built in Orillia.⁸ Hale tirelessly promoted Orillia’s economic interests, most notably as the proprietor of the weekly *Packet* newspaper and as the president of the town’s Board of Trade. Hale also founded the Orillia branch of the Canadian Club in 1905 and proved the driving

⁶ Quoted in Kathryn McPherson, “Carving Out a Past: The Canadian Nurses’ Association War Memorial,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 29:58 (1996), 424. Additional studies examining the historical representations of Canada’s First Nations include: Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992); Ruth B. Phillips, “Settler Monuments, Indigenous Memory: Dis-membering and Re-membering Canadian Art History,” in Nelson and Olin, *Monuments and Memory*, 281-304; and Sarah A. Wilkinson, “The Living Monument: A Consideration of the Politics of Indigenous Representation and Public Historical Monuments in Quebec” (MA Thesis: Concordia University, 2011). For the representation of Aboriginals in Australian memorial sculpture, see Stephen Slemon, “Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing,” *Kunapipi*, 9:3 (1987), 1-16, and Joanna Besley, “At the Intersection of History and Memory: Monuments in Queensland,” *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, 11 (2005), 38-46.

⁷ See E.J. Noble, “Entrepreneurship and Nineteenth Century Urban Growth: A Case Study of Orillia, Ontario,” *Urban History Review*, 9:1 (1980), 64-89.

⁸ For an overview of Tudhope’s business activities, see Randy Richmond, *The Orillia Spirit: An Illustrated History of Orillia* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1996), 54-58.

force behind the creation of the Orillia Water, Light, and Power Commission in 1913. Hale cultivated extensive political contacts at municipal, provincial, and national levels before 1914, and he later became a friend and confidant of Prime Minister Arthur Meighen and Ontario Premier Leslie Frost.⁹

Hale championed the construction of the Champlain monument in Orillia. After working himself to exhaustion supporting the Conservative Party's successful effort to defeat reciprocity in the 1911 federal election, Hale vacationed in the Maritimes and Quebec during the summer of 1912 and viewed the monuments to Champlain in Saint John and Quebec City. Hale immediately conceived a plan to mark the tercentenary of Champlain's presence in Huronia by erecting a monument in Orillia, the closest town to the site of the Huron capital of Cahigué in 1615. Hale rejected early advice that a proposed monument be modest in size; since the existing statues in Saint John and Quebec City were designed to showcase provincial and not local history, Hale argued, "nothing less imposing would be worthy of Ontario, and of the great explorer who led the first white expedition into its forest depths."¹⁰ Returning to Orillia, Hale presented his idea to the town's Canadian Club, and the plan for a

monument to be unveiled on 17 August 1915—the three-hundredth anniversary of Champlain's arrival in Cahigué—received approval on 6 February 1913. Dr. Alex Fraser, the Provincial Archivist of Ontario, advised Hale that Orillia should aim for "something really outstanding," since it would be "easier to put over a big deal than something smaller and commonplace."¹¹ Hale took this advice and doubled the proposed fundraising target from the already substantial sum of \$10,000 to \$20,000, believing that an ambitious fundraising campaign would offset the danger that "our proposal will be treated as local and lumped in with a lot of other celebrations throughout the country."¹²

Subscriptions covering the monument's initial proposed cost were quickly secured. Lord Strathcona pledged \$1,000, the Orillia town council voted \$1,500, and the Ontario government—after some prevarication—promised \$2,500 towards the project. Hale and Fraser arranged a meeting with Prime Minister Robert Borden in Ottawa on 22 February 1913 to ask the Dominion government for a \$10,000 contribution. Borden proved unable to see the representatives of the Champlain tercentenary committee because of his commitments in parliament, but Minister of Finance Sir Thomas White, a patron of

⁹ For an autobiographical account of Hale's career, see *Reminiscences of Charles Harold Hale: Orillia, 1874-1963* (Orillia: Stubbley Printing, 1966).

¹⁰ "The Story of the Champlain Monument," *Orillia Packet*, 2 July 1925.

¹¹ Quoted in J.C. Grossmith, ed., *Anecdotes of Old Orillia: A Collection of the Works of Allan Ironside* (Orillia: Orillia Historical Society, 1984), 90.

¹² Hale to Fraser, 22 February 1913, Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO], Champlain Monument Committee Fonds [hereafter CMC], Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914.

the arts with a keen interest in Canadian history, promised the visiting delegation that he would recommend to his cabinet colleagues that money be voted to support the construction of the monument.¹³ Parliamentary estimates subsequently allotted \$7,500 to the Orillia undertaking, and White privately assured Hale that additional funds would be provided if needed. Eventually, the Borden government's contribution totaled \$12,500. White also placed Hale in contact with Sir Edmund Walker, the widely-connected president of the Canadian Bank of Commerce and of the Champlain Society, and Walker enthusiastically endorsed the effort to build the Champlain monument. "For ten years," Hale later recalled, Walker "gave us unsparingly of his time, and his advice and active assistance were invaluable."¹⁴

Assured of financial support, the tercentenary committee released an international call for preliminary designs of the monument in December 1913. Open to British subjects and citizens of the French Republic, white plaster sketch-models on a uniform scale of 1.5 inches to the foot would display "as the chief feature of the monument a statue of Champlain upon a pedestal which may or may not have other figures emblematic of circumstances connected with his expedition and its re-

sults." Entrants were instructed to consult Champlain's journals of his expedition to Huronia, Francis Parkman's *Pioneers of France in the New World*, and Narcisse-Eutrope Dionne's *Champlain* in the *Makers of Canada* series for historical context. All designs were to be submitted by 20 June 1914, and a "competent committee" of five or seven members would conduct a blind adjudication of the entries and announce a winning submission by 20 July 1914; a prize of \$500 would also be awarded to the second place model.¹⁵

Twenty-two sculptors—six from France, nine from Canada, and seven from Britain—submitted entries to the Champlain monument competition. French entrants included Medal of Honor recipient Ernest Dubois and Prix du Rome winner Paul Roussel. Both men were famous for their bronze and marble compositions, with Dubois' depiction of French Revolutionary zeal in "Le Vengeur" displayed in the Pantheon and Roussel's statue of the Duc d'Aumale adorning the Louvre Palace. Canadian competitors included Hamilton MacCarthy, the sculptor of the Ottawa monument to Champlain unveiled in 1915, and Emanuel Hahn, who would later become one of the country's most prolific sculptors. British entries received both top prizes. F. Fleming Baxter,

¹³ "Memorandum Regarding Proposed Memorial to Samuel de Champlain," Undated, AO, CMC, Box 3, MU 530, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Misc. Papers, Pictures, etc.

¹⁴ Hale, *Reminiscences of Charles Harold Hale*, 23. For a solid overview of Walker's life and career, see Barbara Marshall, "Sir Edmund Walker, Servant of Canada" (MA Thesis: University of British Columbia, 1971).

¹⁵ "Proposed Monument to Samuel de Champlain at Orillia, Ontario, Canada," 20 December 1913, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914. Advertisements sponsored by the tercentenary committee were placed in leading newspapers in Canada, France, and England, including the *Times* of London.

Figure 1—Vernon March's 1914 Competition Submission. [Source: Archives of Ontario, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914]

a member of the Royal Society of British Sculptors whose internationally exhibited "The Prayer of Faith" had been donated to Edmonton's Strathcona Library in 1913, claimed the second place prize. Vernon March emerged victorious in the competition. Although only twenty-two years old, March belonged to a family of distinguished artists and sculptors, and he would eventually design the South African Cenotaph in Cape Town and the National War Memorial in Ottawa. Unfortunately, only four of the contest entries (in whole or in part) submitted by these sculptors can be located, with the majority of the remaining submissions being either destroyed or returned to their creators.¹⁶

The announcement on 10 October 1914 awarding the Champlain monument commission to March generated considerable controversy. The artistic merit of March's submission (see Figure 1) was not challenged. The proposed twelve-foot bronze of Champlain astride a rough-hewn stone pedestal successfully endeavoured "to express in the pose of



the figure the energy and courage of the explorer, and yet to keep a dignified and thoughtful attitude." The groups—in the original design also in stone—on each side of the pedestal represented "the introduction of Commerce and Christianity to the Indians, the standing figures being on the one side a priest and on the other a trader."¹⁷ But March also held advantages not available to other entrants. At the

¹⁶ Nine of the plaster models were destroyed and eight were returned. One model each was donated to the Orillia Collegiate Institute and the Orillia Armoury, and the Orillia Public Library received Baxter's second place model. The model submitted by Emanuel Hahn is held in private hands. Only the controversial bronze statue of Champlain comprising part of March's entry remains, and it is located in the Orillia Public Library. The disposition of the twenty-second model is unknown. Baxter's model was destroyed during library renovations at some point after the Second World War. For a list of the sculptors, their addresses, the disposition of the models, and the number of cases required to pack each entry, see "List of Models for Champlain Monument," Undated, Folder Champlain Monument Unveiling, File Orilliana, Orillia Public Library.

¹⁷ "Monument to Samuel de Champlain," Undated, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914.

outset of the competition, Sir Edmund Walker, who had himself previously commissioned works from the March family,¹⁸ identified March as a sculptor who should be specifically encouraged to submit an entry, and March “eagerly accepted” the invitation;¹⁹ the only other sculptor invited appears to have been Sir Walter Allward, who declined to participate. March also contacted Hale about submitting the statue of Champlain in his proposed design in metal in direct violation of the published rules of the competition that all models consist entirely of plaster. Walker personally approved March’s request despite being a member of the jury vetting the models, thereby guaranteeing that the mandated anonymity of the entries would be compromised.

Private and public complaints about the competition process subsequently reached the Champlain tercentenary committee. “It is to be regretted that the work of the Statue was not placed in Canadian hands,” Hamilton MacCarthy informed Hale, since “visitors from abroad would prefer seeing the products of Canadian artists rather than European importations.”²⁰ French sculptor Maurice Favre protested

March’s violation of the published rules in offering his bronze of Champlain and expressed to the chair of the adjudication panel his hope that “justice may be done to all those who have made considerable sacrifice in a serious endeavour to supply, in conformity with your rules and suggestions, a model satisfactory to the Judges appointed.”²¹ Toronto sculptor A.J. Clark issued the most damning indictment of the monument selection process through a printed pamphlet that emphasized the unfair advantages granted to March and the dominance of Walker in the selection process. “I contend,” Clark concluded, “that the entire competition was a farce,” and he called for the federal government to reconsider its decision to vote public funds for the Orillia monument.²² All of these protests fell on deaf ears. Walker brusquely informed Hale that the selection process could not be challenged and that the committee had deemed every other entry apart from March’s to be “unsuitable.”²³ Furthermore, Eric Brown, the Director of the National Gallery of Canada and a member of the judging committee, supported Walker’s position despite March’s “technical disqualification.” Favre,

¹⁸ Sidney March to Walker, 14 October 1914, Sir Edmund Walker Papers [hereafter EWP], Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Box 12, File Oct 14-23/1914.

¹⁹ Hale, *Reminiscences of Charles Harold Hale*, 24.

²⁰ MacCarthy to Hale, 18 October 1914, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914.

²¹ Favre to Clark, 13 October 1914, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914. Favre had traveled to Orillia for the announcement of the competition results and engaged in a series of sharp personal and written confrontations with Sir Edmund Walker.

²² “Statement of the Unfair Competition for the Champlain Monument at Orillia, Ontario, to which Government Grants Were Made,” 1 February 1915, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1915.

²³ Walker to Hale, 21 October 1915, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914.

in Brown's viewpoint, had the least credibility in pursuing his grievances, since his own model was "not made to scale and it as obviously violates the conditions with its coloured flowers, sawdust, gravel, and painted background far more than that of Mr. March."²⁴

The growing intensity of the First World War quickly rendered this bickering irrelevant. The tercentenary committee decided in January 1915 that the planned August 1915 unveiling celebration would be postponed. In the back of the committee members' minds, Hale reported, "is a feeling of apprehension arising out of the fact that so many of our young men have left for the front, and that consequently some of our best families may be in no mood for 'celebrating' next August."²⁵ On 17 August 1915, therefore, a scaled-back celebration of the three-hundredth anniversary of Champlain's arrival in Orillia occurred with the placing of a tablet at the bridge over the Narrows linking Lake Couchiching and Lake Simcoe in the afternoon and a municipal celebration in the evening that turned into a patriotic rally. A.L. Decarie, the Provincial Secretary of Quebec, delivered the primary oration, ignoring any mention of Champlain's interaction with the Hurons and emphasizing instead that the difficult nature of the French explorer's time in Huronia should

serve as inspiration to men and women seeking to protect Canada from Prussian imperialism. "Champlain, you may sleep in your grave," Decarie declared, "but your descendants will invoke your ghost, not to frighten but to fortify, to virilise courage, to strengthen energies, to give younger generations the example of self-denial for the sake of common interests, the example of far-reaching patriotism."²⁶ The tercentenary committee raised more than \$15,000 in pledges from this event and used it to purchase machine guns, a field kitchen, and ambulances for the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

In England, March proved unable to extricate himself from national service commitments and commence work on the Champlain monument during the First World War once he had been formally contracted to undertake the project in 1916. Sir Edmund Walker appealed directly to J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, March's district deferment officer, in November 1916 to secure the sculptor's release from essential war work with the Royal Flying Corps. But Walker's pleas fell on deaf ears. "If I were to get him back into his foundry," Wheeler-Bennett explained, "he would have to secure labour to assist him and there would be a good deal of unpleasant criticism in the district on account of the labour trouble."²⁷ Although March obtained a temporary release from

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Brown to Hale, 19 October 1914.

²⁵ Hale to Fraser, 20 January 1915, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1915.

²⁶ "Orillia's 300th Birthday," *Orillia Packet*, 19 August 1915.

²⁷ Wheeler-Bennett to Walker, 8 December 1916, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1916-1918.

war work in 1917 because of ill health, he quickly resumed his national service position and informed Hale in March 1918 that "I have not been able to carry out my intentions with regard to the statue of Champlain and have not been able to get anything done that would be worthwhile."²⁸ The end of the war in November 1918 finally allowed March to devote his full attention to the Champlain commission. "I commenced work on the Champlain memorial on the 14th of this month," he informed Hale days after the Armistice," and I can see no reason why the progress of the work should not continue without further interruption."²⁹

The Design of the Champlain Monument

March—who had originally hoped to sculpt the monument in Canada³⁰—prepared his early mock-ups of the main statue of Champlain and the two side panels (which were now also to be cast in bronze) based on an extensive package of historical exhibits compiled during the war by James Kenney, the Director of Historical Research at the Public Archives of Canada. Kenney noted the difficulty of

providing representations of historical figures involved in March's design:

We have been able to find no trustworthy information regarding the appearance of Champlain. There seems to be nothing available in the way of portraits of the Jesuit missionaries except an idealized plate published in 1664 and the bust of Brébeuf in the Seminary at Quebec. There is a considerable amount of information, not all of which is consistent, regarding the personal appearance of the Huron Indians. The most important source is, of course, the Jesuit Relations, and a careful examination might discover further passages than those I am sending giving additional items of interest. I am inclined to think, however, that I am sending all of first-rate importance.³¹

Despite these reservations, Sir Edmund Walker believed that March's sculptures would be "free from all possibility of historical error" if he used this historical material in an effective manner.³²

Kenney's thirty-item catalogue of evidence certainly would have allowed March to obtain a reasonable picture of the human features of European explorers in Huronia while offering more ambiguous representations of the region's Huron population during the early-seventeenth century. Kenney acknowledged

²⁸ *Ibid.*, March to Hale, 31 March 1918.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, March to Hale, 20 November 1918.

³⁰ March to Walker, 25 May 1915, EWP, Box 61, File Champlain Tercentenary Celebration. Among the reasons given by March for working in Canada was that it was "the only possible way of getting a native Indian to sit for me."

³¹ Kenney to Walker, 10 May 1916, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1916-1918. Kenney mistakenly identifies the Jesuits as accompanying Champlain in his travels through Huronia instead of the Recollects. The Jesuit missionary Jean de Brébeuf did not arrive in Huronia until 1626 and served until his martyrdom there at the hands of the Iroquois in 1649.

³² Walker to Hale, 14 February 1917, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1916-1918.

the historical consensus that a true likeness of Champlain did not exist,³³ but he provided numerous examples of popular portrayals of the French explorer, most notably the 1870 portrait by Théophile Hamel. Photographs of multiple portraits and busts of Brébeuf and Father Isaac Jogues, who were martyred by the Mohawks in the 1640s, clearly served as inspiration for March's depictions of the Recollect figure—Joseph Le Caron, one of Champlain's companions in 1615—in the “Christianity” panel of the Champlain monument design. Numerous exhibits of Hurons provided by Kenney, however, seemingly failed to provide accurate depiction that matched the remarkably detailed physical features evident in March's final side panel sculptures. In addition to written descriptions of Huron appearance found in Champlain's travel accounts, Kenney included multiple images contained in the 1619 edition of Champlain's *Voyages*, the title page of Gabriel Sagard's *Le Grand Voyage du Pays des Hurons*, and various illustrations from Joseph-François Lafitau's *Mœurs des Sauvages Américains*. No photographs of modern Aboriginal populations seem to have been provided to March at this stage.

Armed with this historical information, March worked quickly to produce scale models of the side groupings. In

May 1919, he forwarded six photographs—that unfortunately cannot be located³⁴—to Walker of the “Christianity” and “Commerce” panels and outlined additional sources he used to compose the models. “I have varied slightly the fashion of weaving the hair of the four ‘Hurons,’” March noted, based on descriptions found in the *Jesuit Relations*, and “the ornamentation of the ‘Huron’ garments etc. I have taken from specimens in the British Museum.” The chief modification to the *coureur de bois* figure in the “Commerce” group resulted in a change of dress to feature “a loose shirt open at the collar, leather trousers supported by a belt, [and] in his right hand is a gun and thrown loosely over his left arm is a Bear skin.” Furthermore, the roll of skins depicted in the original plaster model had been replaced by flat skins spread across the knees of the two Hurons. “I think,” March informed Walker, “I have obtained more unity in the lines of the composition by this alteration.”³⁵ The only substantive alteration to the Recollect missionary in the “Christianity” panel resulted in the placement of the crucifix in the priest's hand at a higher level. Walker did not examine these photographs until September 1919 after he returned from a trip to Asia. “The Indians,” he informed Charles Hale, “are very finely modeled, but in the case of Jean de Brebeuf the

³³ For an overview of the historical representations of Champlain's likeness, see Denis Martin, “Discovering the Face of Samuel de Champlain,” in Litalien and Vaugeois, eds., *Champlain: The Birth of French America*, 354–63.

³⁴ These photographs are found in Box 14 of the Sir Edmund Walker Papers.

³⁵ March to Walker, 9 May 1919, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1919–1921.

white man is made so physically small as to be noticeable, and to somewhat destroy the composition.”³⁶ Walker and Hale subsequently agreed that the photographs of the side panels would be submitted to recognized experts for proper evaluation.

The expert responses received were hardly encouraging. C.M. Barbeau, who worked in the Anthropological Branch of the Geological Survey of Canada, commented

that March “shows no real knowledge of the Huron Indians” and that “the features and costume might be those of Algerians or Mediterranean folk rather than of Native Americans.” In terms of the features of the Hurons, Barbeau emphasized that “I cannot recognize anything Huron-like or even Indian” in the “Christianity” panel. “Instead of a long pointed chin, thin lips, aquiline nose with a low tip,” he claimed, “the Hurons had a markedly receding chin, usually thick lips—specially the lower lip—, and often a broad spatulate-like nose at the tip.” Barbeau also noted that the full head of woven hair for the Hurons in March’s model was inaccurate.



Figure 2—Original Clay Sculpture of Champlain. [Source: Sir Edmund Walker Papers, Box 61, File Champlain Tercentenary Celebration]

Instead, the Hurons “seem to have been in the habit of removing the hair all around the head and of leaving only a circular tuft to grow to full length around the middle of the head.” Apart from the physical features of the Hurons, Barbeau wrote that “the costume is also drawn from imagination. No trousers were known to the American natives ... [and] the decorative patterns on the trousers are also unrealistic. The tomahawk could

not be accepted by those who know the weapon.” Although Barbeau believed that March possessed “talent and ability,” he concluded that “I do not find that he has at all succeeded in bridging the chasm which separates him from his subject.”³⁷ A second, less detailed review provided by William Smith, the Secretary of the Publication Board within the Public Archives of Canada, noted that March’s depiction of the Hurons wearing moccasins in the summertime was incorrect, while the stone hatchet portrayed in the models “had been abandoned very early” in favour of French iron hatchets.³⁸

While March’s side group mod-

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Walker to Hale, 10 September 1919

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Barbeau to Smith, 16 November 1919.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Smith to Hale, 13 December 1919.

els were being evaluated, he continued working on the main statue of Champlain. In September 1919, he informed his Canadian benefactors that the work was "progressing satisfactorily" but that it would not serve any useful purpose to send photographs of the preliminary model "before it is in my opinion complete and finished from all views."³⁹ Three months later, March finally provided a picture (Figure 2) of the twelve-foot clay model of Champlain. The British sculptor noted that since "any alterations now would entail a considerable amount of extra time and work for me," he was not seeking detailed critiques of the Champlain model. Instead, he sought "approval of the general arrangement of the costume, which is correct as far as I have been able to ascertain in this Country."⁴⁰ Once again, Hale distributed the images provided by March for expert appraisal concerning the historical accuracy of the depiction of Champlain.

In contrast to the uniformly negative appraisals of many details of March's side groupings, professional opinion on his model of the Champlain statue proved to be mixed. William Smith bluntly informed Hale that "we have talked over the photograph of Champlain here, and there is a general disposition to criticize it."⁴¹ Smith also sent the photographs of the model to the Rev. P.M. O'Leary in

Quebec City, a "deeply learned" specialist of New France who would have the advantage of comparing March's design with the Champlain statue erected in the Quebec capital in 1898. O'Leary subsequently noted that the proposed Orillia statue was "far more elaborate" than the Quebec City monument, and he doubted whether Champlain "ever wore such sumptuous raiment." Nonetheless, O'Leary believed that both representations of Champlain's clothing "were of the period."⁴² But these criticisms focusing on the dress in March's proposed Champlain statue were countered by positive judgments. Alexander Fraser, the Provincial Archivist of Ontario, believed that the depiction of Champlain "fulfills the high expectations of what could come to us from this distinguished artists" and that, as a result, Orillia would have "one of the very finest figure monuments of Canada."⁴³ The strongest support of March's model came from Sir Edmund Walker, who agreed strongly with Hale "there is not only no reason why the Orillia statue should resemble that of Quebec, but there is a very good reason that it should not do so." In Walker's view, the statue at Quebec appeared "altogether too much like a polished gentleman for Champlain, and that Mr. March has succeeded in producing a more rugged type."⁴⁴

Armed with these evaluations, Hale

³⁹ *Ibid.*, March to Hale, 9 September 1919.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, March to Hale, 6 December 1919.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Smith to Hale, 22 January 1920.

⁴² *Ibid.*, O'Leary to Smith, 23 January 1920.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Fraser to Hale, 20 January 1920.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Walker to Hale, 16 February 1920.

duly informed March of the problems raised by Canadian evaluators of the clay models. In terms of the side panels, Hale emphasized that “from an artistic perspective, the groups are considered excellent,” but he noted the problems raised by the assessors in terms of the dress, physical features, and hair style of the Hurons displayed in the models and the presence of a stone tomahawk. Furthermore, Hale stressed that “it is also felt that beside the splendid physical proportions of the Indians the figures of the white men appear rather insignificant.” This was especially true “in the case of Brebeuf, which scarcely gives the commanding impression of whom Parkman describes as ‘bold scion of a warlike race.’” Although Hale recognized that “an artist cannot be held down to historical detail too closely,” he informed March that changes would be necessary to bring the depiction of the figures “more into accord with the reality,” and he forwarded to March all of the documentation he had received from the assessors.⁴⁵ Hale then commented on the Champlain model and the “very favourable” reviews it had received, noting that the Orillia tercentenary committee did not take seriously the criticisms from those who compared March’s depiction of Champlain to the existing Quebec City statue. Hale also forwarded an additional appraisal criticizing the arrange-

ment of the cloak over Champlain’s right shoulder, but “aside from this the general verdict is that the statue is very fine, and the committee is much gratified to find that some of our leading art critics think we are going to have a statue that will be a credit to all concerned.”⁴⁶

March took these assessments of his work in stride and worked throughout 1920 to finalize the models for the bronze castings. “I am only too glad to have the criticisms of the figures in my groups,” he reported to Hale, “and I shall alter the details accordingly.” Correspondence relating to the definitive endorsement of the side panels is not extant, although March promised that he would send Hale “photographs of the groups incorporating the corrected details.”⁴⁷ Based on the finished bronze side panels, it appears March altered his models according to the external assessments; the four Hurons, for example, are nearly naked in the unveiled monument instead of wearing trousers and moccasins in the early models. March sent pictures of the finished Champlain figure in June 1920 indicating that “I am most anxious to have your committee’s final approval of the clay model.”⁴⁸ A second round of evaluations returned unanimously positive opinions, with Alexander Fraser noting that “the model has been very carefully and successfully worked out.”⁴⁹ After receiving final ap-

⁴⁵ Hale to March, 16 January, 1920, EWP, Box 15, File July 1919-1921.

⁴⁶ Hale to March, 19 February 1920, AO, CMC, Box 1, MU 528, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1919-1921.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, March to Hale, 9 February 1920.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, March to Hale, 5 June 1920.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Fraser to Hale, 26 June 1920.

proval from the tercentenary committee, March informed Hale on 9 October 1920 that "I have finished the last piece of the clay model of Champlain today and I trust the last section of the plaster mould will be taken by the end of this year" to allow for the bronzes to be cast.⁵⁰

The Unveiling of the Champlain Monument

This promise of timely completing the Champlain monument proved illusory. The issue of funding lay at the heart of this delay that would last for more than four years. Escalating metal costs by the end of 1920 caused March to lament that "I cannot possibly carry out the contract of 1916 without great actual loss to myself."⁵¹ The Tercentenary Committee initially held firm after receiving March's demands for additional funds. "The terms of the contract are, of course, explicit, both to price and delivery," Hale sternly informed March in April 1921, emphasizing that "it is quite out of the question for us to increase the payment for your part of the work."⁵² After being counseled that abandoning the project would be a "national calamity,"⁵³ however, Orillia organizers eventually retreated from this hardline position, and they also rejected a plan to eliminate the side group-

ings from March's design as a cost-saving device. To accommodate March's financial demands, Hale and Walker turned to the Ontario and federal governments for additional contributions, securing a supplementary \$2,500 donation from each source. Furthermore, the government of Quebec—which the tercentenary committee had deliberately not approached in the first round of subscriptions before the First World War as a gesture of goodwill—received an appeal for funding and contributed \$5,000. Although the full details of March's remuneration are incomplete, it appears that he eventually received nearly forty-percent more than the amount initially called for in his signed 1916 contract.⁵⁴

Despite the injection of funds into the project, progress remained sluggish. By January 1924, March reported that only the bronze of the Champlain figure had been completed, causing Orillia organizers to again postpone the planned unveiling celebration scheduled for the upcoming July. March did not assume full responsibility for these ongoing delays. After considerable debate, the tercentenary committee did not compose the final text of the monument inscription until early 1924. Furthermore, Walker's sudden death in March 1924 removed one of

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, March to Hale, 9 October 1920. The final bronze of Champlain appears largely unchanged from the clay model shown in Figure 2—the only substantive (and historically curious) alteration seems to be the addition of spurs to the unveiled statue.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, March to Hale, 16 October 1920.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Hale to March, 16 April 1921.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Fraser to Hale, 13 August 1921.

⁵⁴ A handwritten insertion for "Contingent Liabilities" in the amount of \$7,500 appears in a typed ledger detailing payments to March. The value of funds paid out under the original contract was slightly less than \$9,000. See "Summary—Champlain Tercentenary Fund," 8 November 1924.



Figure 3—C.H. Hale (l) and Vernon March in front of the “Christianity” Panel, 1924. [Source: Orillia Public Library, File ‘Orilliana’]

the project’s driving forces from pushing the construction schedule forward. Finally, the stone plinth for the monument had been sub-contracted to the Canadian Benedict Stone Company of Montreal, and complex measurements required for the fitting of the bronzes to this pedestal required a stream of trans-Atlantic correspondence throughout 1924. Although Hale visited March’s Farnborough foundry in the summer of 1924 (see Figure 3) to expedite the process, it was not until April 1925 that March informed Hale that “the last figure of the “Commerce”

group has now been cast successfully and we are making a great effort to complete the fitting together and packing of this group before the end of the month along with the other bronzes.”⁵⁵ By mid-May 1925, the bronzes had arrived in Orillia and March and his brother Sidney were also on-site to supervise construction. “It is really magnificent,” Hale enthused after seeing the finished monument (see Figures 4-6); “I have never seen anything that impressed me so much both in its proportions and in its details.”⁵⁶

The Orillia tercentenary committee carefully planned the monument’s unveiling scheduled for 1 July 1925 based on a celebration of European exploration and, in particular, the promotion of good French/English relations—sentiments expressed in the official monument inscription plaque embedded into the plinth:

1615-1915

Erected to commemorate the advent into Ontario of the white race, under the leadership of Samuel de Champlain, the intrepid French explorer and colonizer, who, with fifteen companions, arrived in these parts in the summer of 1615, and spent the following winter with the Indians, making his headquarters at Cahiagué, the chief village of the Hurons, which was near this place.

A symbol of good will between the French and English speaking people of Canada.

⁵⁵ March to Hale, 1 April 1925, AO, CMC, Box 3, MU 530, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1925-28.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Hale to Fraser, ? May 1925.



Left: Figure 4—Champlain Monument, Front View. [Source: Orillia Public Library, "Souvenir Booklet of The Champlain Monument at Orillia"]

Below left: Figure 5—Champlain Monument, "Christianity" Side Group. [Source: Orillia Public Library, "Souvenir Booklet of The Champlain Monument at Orillia"]

Below: Figure 6—Champlain Monument, "Commerce" Side Group. [Source: Orillia Public Library, "Souvenir Booklet of The Champlain Monument at Orillia"]



In promoting the Bonne Entente, Hale believed that the unveiling of "a noble

national monument" promoting the historical links between Ontario and Quebec would "give distinction to the occasion and a flavour that could not be imparted elsewhere."⁵⁷ Hale explicitly appealed to ethnic and linguistic unity in his personal invitation to Rodolphe Lemieux to serve as the keynote orator; the Speaker of the House of Commons

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Hale to Fraser, ? January 1925. An Orillia delegation led by Mayor George McLean also toured Quebec in the first week of February 1925 promoting the Champlain monument unveiling.

qualified for this honour “by your office, lineage, and record to exemplify and give expression to the unity of purpose and of a sentiment which should characterize the two great races that form the basis of Canadian nationality.”⁵⁸

The official promotional pamphlet for the event celebrated Champlain’s exploits in overcoming—in the quoted words of Francis Parkman—the “primitive barbarism” of the Hurons and requested the co-operation and attendance “of all who are desirous of promoting good relations between the two provinces, and between the races which people them.”⁵⁹ Tellingly, Champlain’s reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship with his Huron hosts in 1615-16 received no attention, and the Orillia committee made no attempt to include First Nations participation with the exception of inviting several Indigenous chiefs, including Lorenzo Big Canoe of the Chippewas at Georgina Island and Ovide Sioui of the Hurons at Lorette. The official souvenir booklet of the celebration also revealed the casual, unconscious prejudice displayed in the monument, particularly in the “Christianity” scene:

[T]he right hand group shows a robed priest with uplifted cross in one hand, and open breviary in the other, while at his feet are seated two stalwart Indian braves into whose ears the story of the Gospel is being poured. In the face of the priest is all the benevolence

and zeal with which those early teachers were fired, and in those of the listeners one reads the struggle of mind which preceded acceptance of the message. In a wonderful way the artist has contrasted the aesthetic force of the cultured missionary with the brute power of the savage.⁶⁰

After a luncheon for invited guests, the official program of the 1 July 1925 unveiling of the Champlain monument in Orillia commenced at 1:30 with the singing of national airs by 500 school-children in Couchiching Park, followed by a historical recreation of Champlain meeting the Huron Chief Darontal (Atironta) in 1615. Organized by the Orillia Women’s Canadian Club and directed by Roy Mitchell, the former director of the University of Toronto’s Hart House Theatre, the pageant featured a large contingent of adult and child performers—none, apparently, of Indigenous descent. The reenactment witnessed a canoe flotilla of actors representing Champlain and his European colleagues accompanied by Hurons leaving Cedar Island in Lake Couchiching and landing on the beach in Couchiching Park, where a Huron village had been constructed representing Chief Darontal’s capital at Cahiagué (see Figures 7-10). The souvenir publication effectively summarized the decidedly Eurocentric perspective on the pageant:

With over 250 men, women, and children in the costumes of aboriginal times, the scene

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Hale to Lemieux, 23 March 1925. Hale also extended a personal invitation to Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, but King could not attend because of Parliamentary business.

⁵⁹ “The Champlain Monument,” undated, AO, CMC, Box 3, MU 530, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Misc. Papers, Pictures.

⁶⁰ “An Appreciation of the Monument,” in “Souvenir Booklet of The Champlain Monument at Orillia,” Undated, Folder Champlain Monument, File Orilliana, Orillia Public Library.

Top to Bottom: Figure 7—Non-Aboriginal Actors Preparing for the Tercentenary Historical Pageant. [Source: Orillia Public Library, File 'Orilliana']

Figure 8—Commencing the Tercentenary Historical Pageant. C.H. Hale provided the following description on the back of this photograph: "These are birchbark canoes and (white) Indians crossing from Cedar Island to Couchiching Beach Park in the historical pageant 'The Landing of Champlain' on the occasion of the unveiling of the Champlain monument on July 1, 1925." [Source: Orillia Public Library, File 'Orilliana']

Figure 9—Recreation of Champlain's Party Meeting Chief Darontal during the Tercentenary Historical Pageant. [Source: Author Photograph of Parks Canada Marker, Couchiching Beach Park]

lacked nothing in the picturesque. There were children playing, braves loafing and gambling, and squaws busy at the work of the camp—cooking, grinding corn, tanning skins, or repairing canoes. Sometimes as they worked, the women took up an Indian melody. From group to group it passed, strange, rhythmic, intense music, crooned in unison. Suddenly, Champlain and his ten companions and Indian escort arrive in canoes, and the firing of a shot creates consternation among the women and children, followed later by curious inspection of their strange visitors. The Indians welcome their white allies with the festive "Adonwah" dance, in which the squaws croon the thrilling, vibrant melody, while the braves, having planted their ceremonial spears in a circle, dance round them in stiff, jerky motions.⁶¹

The Dominion Day festivities closed with an outdoor concert by the Anglo-Canadian Concert Band and a fireworks display. Before these events, Rodolphe Lemieux's afternoon unveiling oration and the evening banquet speeches at the Orillia Armories given by provincial officials—Indigenous leaders did not speak



at any function throughout the day—emphasized French/English harmony and a distinct sense of national identity resulting from Champlain's conquering of the untamed wilderness. "Divine Providence has willed it that the descendants of France and England should live side by side over the vast territory explored

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, "The Unveiling Ceremonies."

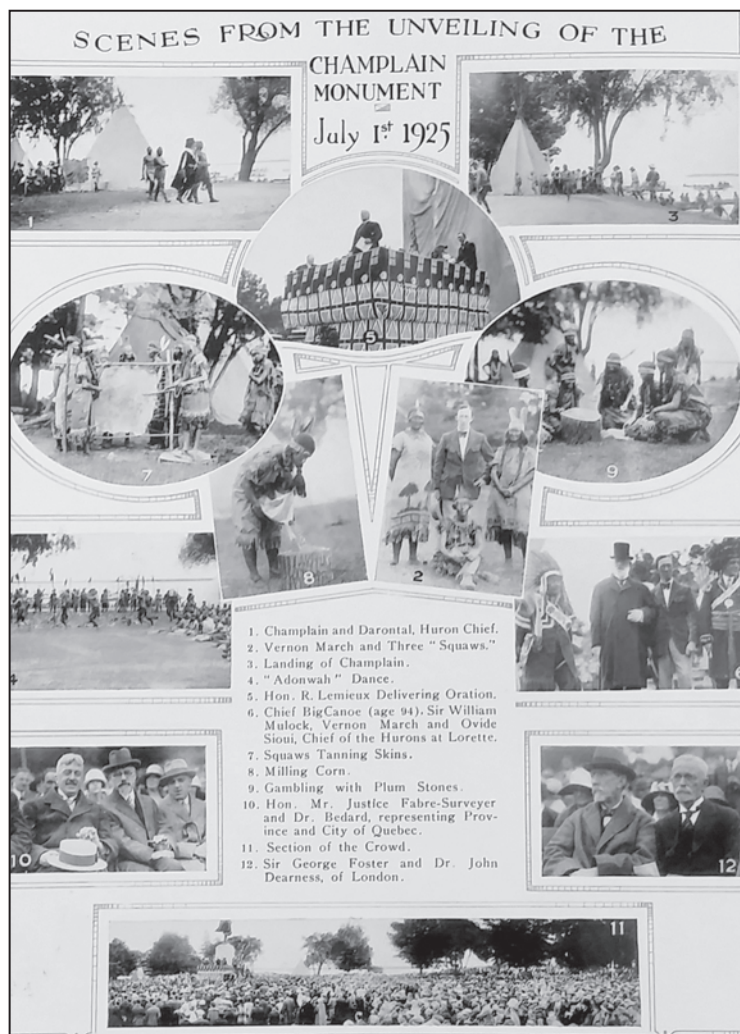


Figure 10—Photo Collage of Tercenary Historical Pageant. [Source: Orillia Public Library, *Souvenir Booklet of The Champlain Monument at Orillia*]

tion.”⁶²

At the banquet, Sir William Mulock, the Chief Justice of Ontario, identified the “two great currents of national life” that blended into a distinct Canadian character, with the Anglo-Saxon “worship of material success” moderated by the influence of French Canadians, who “still retain some of the leisurely virtues and cultivate the art of living.”⁶³ Representing the Quebec delegation, Edouard Fabre-Surveyor, a justice on the provincial Supreme Court, called for the Orillia monument to “perpetuate not only the memory of Champlain, but the principles of fraternity which he preached.” Furthermore,

by Champlain,” Lemieux stressed to his rapt audience. “French and English,” he continued, “have their respective qualities and failings—but it is no vain boast to say that they belong to the most liberal and enlightened nations in the world, the two nations which, from time immemorial, have been at the vanguard of civiliza-

he praised the efforts to promote harmony between English and French and reminded his audience “that there are in this Canada of ours two founding races, speaking two languages, both equally proud of their traditions and literature... and whose ambition is to preserve in its entirety the inheritance received from

⁶² “Mr. Lemieux’s Oration at the Unveiling,” *Orillia Packet*, 2 July 1925.

⁶³ “Contributions from Both Races Will Build Up a Strong Dominion,” *Orillia Packet*, 9 July 1925.

their forefathers.”⁶⁴

The Champlain monument celebration garnered wide praise. “It was the biggest day in the history of Orillia,”⁶⁵ Hale proclaimed, and press accounts chronicling the event appeared in national and international outlets, including the *New York Times* and *The Times* of London. A detailed account in the latter paper, for example, described the “singularly commanding” statue of Champlain, noted the “realistic and impressive” pageant “faithful to historical fact,” and stressed the appeal “for cooperation between Ontario and Quebec and the French and English speaking elements of the Dominion.”⁶⁶ Vernon March proved equally effusive in his praise of the occasion. After touring Western Canada, he informed Hale before embarking for England that “I shall never forget the wonderful reception you and the people of Orillia gave me, and I shall always think of Orillia as the town of happy memories!”⁶⁷ In the decades following the 1925 Dominion Day celebration, the Champlain monument stood as the major landmark used in the tourist promotion of the town and as a symbol, along with Stephen Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, of Orillia’s civic pride, and Hale proudly informed Queen

Elizabeth that it was “one of the finest examples of bronze statuary in Canada” in connection with the royal visit to Couchiching Beach Park in 1959.⁶⁸

The Legacy of the Champlain Monument

The contentious 1969 White Paper—the “Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy”—galvanized Indigenous opposition to federal policies affecting First Nations, and growing discontent about the legacy of colonialism forced the reconsideration of the merits of public monuments depicting Aborigines in the historical narrative of Canada. The statue of Louis Riel installed on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislative Building to mark the province’s centenary in 1970, for example, attracted considerable opposition from Manitoba’s Métis community for its depiction of a conflicted and naked Riel, resulting eventually in the unveiling of a new statue in 1996 deemed more respectful in its portrayal of Riel and the banishment of the original monument to a less-prominent location.⁶⁹ A similar campaign occurred in Ottawa to move the bronze of the Anishinabe scout crouched deferentially at the feet of the Champlain statue on

⁶⁴ “Champlain Tercentenary Celebration Banquet: Brilliant Speeches by Distinguished Orators,” *Orillia Packet*, 9 July 1925. Stephen Leacock also spoke briefly at the banquet in the delivery of a toast.

⁶⁵ “Champlain Celebration a Wonderful Success,” *Orillia Packet*, 2 July 1925.

⁶⁶ “Ontario Monument to Champlain,” *The Times*, 3 July 1925.

⁶⁷ March to Hale, 22 July 1925, AO, CMC, Box 3, MU 530, File Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1925-28.

⁶⁸ Hale to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Undated (1959), File ‘C.H. Hale #60,’ Orillia Public Library.

⁶⁹ See Shannon Bower, “‘Practical Results’: The Riel Statue Controversy at the Manitoba Legislative Building,” *Manitoba History*, 42 (2001-2002), 30-38.

Nepean Point (the scout statue had been added to the monument several years after the original unveiling in 1915). The National Capital Commission promised in 1996 to remove the scout bronze to a new location, a transfer achieved in 1999. "Sensitivities change over time," Commission chairman Marcel Beaudry announced in dedicating the new site in Major's Hill Park, and he noted the NCC "is sensitive to, and supportive of, the appropriate representation of the Aboriginal peoples." Phil Fontaine, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, celebrated the re-dedication of the scout statue as a reflection of the strength of Indigenous communities and their place in Canadian society. "Above all," he emphasized, "it is no longer at the feet of one inaccurately portrayed as a founder of this land."⁷⁰

Similar efforts were undertaken to correct the portrayal of the Hurons in the side panels of the Champlain monument in Orillia. John Wesley Oldham, the Minister of the Rama United Church who appropriated the Indigenous name Owl Man Dancing for himself, orchestrated this campaign. In a letter to the editor of the *Orillia Packet and Times*, Oldham noted that in both scenes "the Indians are portrayed as subservient to the overpowering Black Robe and the fur trader," with the priest carrying a crucifix "that looks more like a weapon" and the

trader "offering useless trinkets for the valuable furs."⁷¹ Oldham subsequently formed a Unity Advisory Committee consisting of local Aboriginal and municipal officials who drafted the text of a new descriptive plaque to be placed beside the Champlain monument:

With the arrival of the French in North America, both they and the Huron Confederacy recognized and welcomed the benefits of equal trade and cultural alliances between the two nations based on mutual trust and respect. Because of this historic partnership the French gained strategic access and a warm welcome to the vast territories of Turtle Island beyond the lands of the Wendat, while the Hurons became a significant partner in what was to become a world-wide trading network based upon the fur trade in beaver pelts. This monument, originally designed in 1915 but not completed until 1925, was re-dedicated on _____ 199_ to commemorate that historical alliance.⁷²

Although the federal government immediately promised to consult with the Unity Advisory Committee and "assist in meeting the target date of July 1, 1997, for the rewording of the plaque,"⁷³ the initiative proved stillborn. The United Church sacked Oldham in March 1999 for insubordination and spiritual unorthodoxy in the face of complaints from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parishioners, depriving the plaque rededication movement in Orillia of its most vocal advocate.⁷⁴ Parks Canada admitted

⁷⁰ "Native Statue Received Own Spot," *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 October 1999.

⁷¹ "If Sculpted Today, What Would It Look Like?" *Orillia Packet and Times*, 26 July 1996.

⁷² Martel to McRae, 21 November 1996, File 'Champlain Monument, Orilliana,' Orillia Public Library.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Copps to DeVillers, 24 March 1997.

⁷⁴ "Clashing with the United Church," *National Post*, 16 June 1999.

in September 2000 that it had been negligent in not following up with the Unity Advisory Committee in 1997 and promised “to pick this up again.” But government officials emphasized that drafting a sensitively-worded plaque would be a “delicate undertaking” and that any new plaque “should be respectful of the monument itself.”⁷⁵ In the event, Parks Canada again failed to broker an agreement about a second plaque, despite the persistent pleas from the leadership of the Mnjikaning First Nation in Rama that the positions of the Huron figures “reflect a negative portrayal of Natives.”⁷⁶ Repeated incidents of vandalism subsequently plagued the Champlain monument, the most notable occurring in 2006 when the faces of several of the Huron figures in the sculpture were spray-painted white, and the plinth supporting the Champlain figure exhibited serious signs of structural decay.

The quadricentennial celebrations of Champlain’s arrival in Huronia demonstrate the distinctly altered attitudes towards the material representation of Indigenous populations in Canadian history. Unveiled on 1 August 2015 in Penetanguishene, “The Meeting” (Figure 11) portrays Champlain’s reception by Chief Aenon of the Huron-Wendat’s Bear tribe as a summit of two equals, breaking the tradition, according to sculptor



Figure 11—“The Meeting” Quadricentenary Monument, Penetanguishene Harbour. [Source: Author Photograph]

Timothy Schmalz, of depicting Indigenous peoples as “gargoyles or in animal filigree.”⁷⁷ The impressive ten-foot bronze portrays Aenon providing a wampum belt to Champlain as a sign of hospitality and harmony. Furthermore, the sculpture incorporates both French and Aboriginal cultural and spiritual imagery, with French symbols of the Holy Trinity and images of explorers and missionaries

⁷⁵ “Agency Admits Monument Gaffe,” *Orillia Packet and Times*, 14 September 2000. A Parks Canada descriptive plaque installed at some point before 1996 approximately twenty metres from the Champlain monument provides a moderately detailed historical overview of Champlain’s Huronia travels and the construction and unveiling of the monument.

⁷⁶ “Monument May Be Brought Up to Date,” *Orillia Packet and Times*, 8 September 2001.

⁷⁷ “A Tribute to Two Cultures—and Their Twin Spiritualities,” *National Post*, 3 August 2015.

sharing equal prominence with the symbols of agricultural abundance provided by the Three Sisters and the depiction of the creation story of Turtle Island. Dedication speeches accompanying the unveiling ceremony also differed sharply from those in Orillia in 1925. Jean Sioui, a hereditary chief of the Huron-Wendat Nation, emphasized the initial positive interaction between the French explorers and Aboriginal tribes in Huronia while noting the “dispossession of our land and major epidemics” that followed. Provincial and federal politicians emphasized the vibrancy of the francophone community established by Champlain, and Premier Kathleen Wynne called for unity among all Ontarians to create a province “that celebrates its diversity as a source of strength.”⁷⁸

Public monuments are created by political and social elites, Nancy Wood notes, “to select and organize representations of the past so that these will be embraced by individuals as their own. If particular representations of the past have permeated the public domain,” Wood emphasizes, “it is because they embody an intentionality—social, political, institutional, and so on—that promotes or authorizes their entry.”⁷⁹ The case study of Orillia’s Champlain monument provides compelling evidence that government and business officials could harness a colonial perception of European exploration in Huronia to rally wide support for

the construction of an edifice celebrating the tercentenary of Champlain’s travels in the region. The First World War, furthermore, provided civic boosters such as C.H. Hale with the fortuitous opportunity to use the monument as a vehicle promoting harmony between francophones and anglophones and guarantee a national and international audience for its unveiling. The design of the monument itself celebrating Champlain’s exploits and emphasizing the benefits of Christianity and commerce reinforced a popular idea of the ultimate progress of Western civilization and guaranteed its appeal within an audience that experienced a wave of economic growth and prosperity and sought cultural reassurance after the shock of the Great War.

But the confluence of events that resulted in the universal acclaim for the Champlain monument within the non-Indigenous community in the inter-war period also reinforces James Young’s assertion that “a monument and its significance are constructed in particular times and places, contingent on the political, historical, and aesthetic realities of the moment.”⁸⁰ Many Orillians currently maintain a strong sentimental attachment to the Champlain monument while remaining largely ambivalent towards the original derogatory posture of the monument’s Aboriginal figures. Nevertheless, the gradual public recognition of the negative legacy of colonialism af-

⁷⁸ “Premier Pays Homage to Champlain,” *Barrie Examiner*, 1 August 2015.

⁷⁹ Nancy Young, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 2.

⁸⁰ James Young, *At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 95.

ter the Second World War and the rise of concerted activist campaigns within First Nations communities opposing negative historical portrayals of Aboriginals have significantly affected the modern perception of Vernon March's portrayal of Champlain in Couchiching Beach Park. In this altered political and cultural en-

vironment, no celebration or public remembrance of the "advent into Ontario of the white race" is contemplated, and genuine efforts—however halting—are being undertaken to provide a more comprehensive and inclusive portrayal of Champlain's sojourn in Huronia in 1615-1616.
