

DID CHAMPLAIN VISIT THE PETUN IN THE BRUCE PENINSULA?

Charles Garrad
February 1997

Abstract

It is argued that Champlain did not visit the Petun (Wyandot) Indians in the Bruce Peninsula because the Petun did not live there.

Introduction

The myth that Samuel de Champlain visited the Bruce Peninsula because he visited the Petun (Wyandot) Indians, who supposedly lived there, originated with the erroneous arguments of Father Arthur E. Jones, S.J.

Father Jones created the myth by, on the one hand, giving unjustified credence to an inaccurate secondary source map, and on the other, ignoring primary source materials such as the maps of Samuel de Champlain, which show no geographical feature which could resemble the Bruce Peninsula. That Champlain could not have reached the Bruce Peninsula from the Huron village of Carhagouha, in difficult winter traveling conditions, in the two days he took to reach the Petun, was ignored.

As the article in which the writer previously addressed this issue (Garrad 1970) is long since out of print, it is now reproduced as an appendix to this Research Bulletin.

It might be mentioned that the misplacement of the Petun on the map that misled Father Jones ___ ("Tabula Novae Franciae" by Fran9ois du Creux (1660)), was copied from an earlier map ("Le Canada, ou Nouvelle France" by Sanson d'Abbeville (1656)) on which "N. du Petun, our San hio" appears to have been placed in the nearest available space. Neither Sanson d'Abbeville nor Frangois du Creux ever visited Canada, and had no way to correct, or experience to recognize, the errors they made (Garrad 1997).

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES TO THOSE IN THE APPENDIX

Garrad, Charles

1970 **Did Champlain Visit the Bruce Peninsula? An Examination of an Ontario Myth.** Ontario History LXII(4)235-239, The Ontario Historical Society, Willowdale.

1997 **Early Maps Locating the Petun.** Research Bulletin no.6 Petun Research Institute, North York.

DID CHAMPLAIN VISIT THE BRUCE PENINSULA? AN EXAMINATION OF AN ONTARIO MYTH

Chas. Garrad

Because of the justified stature of Father A. E. Jones, S.J., as an historian, his statement that the country of the Petuns (Tobacco Nation or Tionnontate) in early historic times "extended as far west as the mouth of the Saugeen and as far north as the townships of St. Edmund and Lindsay in the Bruce Peninsula"[1](#) has not only gained acceptance but has led to the further belief that Champlain consequently reached these regions when visiting this tribe in the winter of 1616 a.d. Such reputable scholars as Fox, Landon, Long, Marquis and Middleton have repeated one or both of these suppositions as facts.[2](#) The Champlain Society's Editors have attempted by means of footnotes to persuade their readers to the same conclusion, as will be discussed. Of Champlain's briefer biographers, Bourne and Dix,[3](#) from pre-Jones sources, route his 1616 journey southwest of Huronia, in contrast to such later writers as Bishop and Syme,[4](#) who compromise at "Owen Sound" and "the southern shore of Georgian Bay." The majority of briefer biographers understandably ignore this small issue completely.[5](#)

Jones was concerned with the Jesuits and not with Champlain, whose map and Journal he therefore ignored. Instead, he unfortunately relied on the work of Du Creux, the inadequacy of which was apparent even to Jones.[6](#)

The writer proposes to examine Champlain's own words and map on the subject and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions.

Champlain's visit to the Attigouantan tribe

The following passage from the Champlain Works series is the one footnoted by the editors to the effect that the Bruce Peninsula is being described:

"The region of the Attigouantan tribe lies in the latitude 44 degrees 30 minutes and is 230 leagues in length to the west and ten in breadth, and in this extent of country there are 18 villages, 6 of which are enclosed and fortified . . . This country is fine and pleasant, for the most part cleared, shaped like Brittany and similarly situated, being almost surrounded and enclosed by the Freshwater Sea . . ." (Here the editors comment on the name "Freshwater Sea" - "Lake Huron. The peninsula between the Georgian Bay and Lake Huron he compares to the shape of Brittany").[7](#)

The Attigouantan tribe was not the Petun, but the Huron Bear of the Township of Tiny in the Penetanguishene Peninsula, where as early as 1888 A. F. Hunter had located twenty-seven aboriginal village sites, of which fourteen had yielded French trade material.[8](#) The Bruce Peninsula on the other hand to this day has yielded not a single large historic palisaded village site although competently searched by authorities including the National Museum of Canada.[9](#) Fox pointed out that the density of the forest in the Bruce when ceded to the Crown "leaves no doubt that the area could never have been "for the most part cleared" at any previous time."[10](#) Champlain specifies his description is of the Attigouantan country which is well documented as being in the Penetanguishene, not the Bruce, Peninsula. For an explanation of Champlain's conception of the Penetanguishene Peninsula's similarity to Brittany in shape and situation, we have only to turn to his map.

Champlain's Map

Although Champlain was "highly trained in cartography and was a keen observer of geographic detail"[11](#) it is reasonable to expect variations in accuracy depending on Champlain's familiarity with the territory being delineated. Regions where he lived and worked might be more accurately rendered than those he could see from a distance and not reach, and those areas unseen but hypothesized to allow completion of the map might bear so little resemblance to reality as to be self-indicating. It follows that regions best described in his text relate to areas most accurately portrayed on the map drawn to accompany it.

The Georgian Bay portion of Champlain's map has a clear representation of the Penetanguishene Peninsula, the Lakes Simcoe/Couchiching/Severn River waterway, overenlarged in keeping with the conception of the Freshwater Sea almost surrounding and enclosing it, implying that Champlain was not entirely familiar with the waterway and assumed somewhat grander dimensions for it than we know it to have. This is the only land body in any way having a resemblance to Brittany and complying with Champlain's description. There is no trace of another land body that could be construed as the Bruce Peninsula.

Most accurately represented is the Tiny Township shoreline of the Georgian Bay between Cedar Point and Wasaga Beach, the home territory of his hosts the Attigouantans. The Nottawasaga River, with two of its tributaries, is indicated with variable accuracy. Continuing south from Wasaga Beach his accuracy rapidly declines and, from Collingwood west along the southern shore of Nottawasaga Bay becomes pure and inaccurate supposition. It would seem, then, that Champlain travelled along the shore no further than Wasaga Beach, and turned inland at the River, most likely on his journey to the "Gens de Petun," marked on his map in an area more like Orangeville than Owen Sound, the Saugeen or the Bruce. Immediately adjacent to the west of the "Gens de Petun" Champlain has marked "Cheveux releves" and for further clues to the locations of both these peoples we may again turn to Champlain's own text, and to other ethno-historic accounts.

Champlain's visit to the Petuns

Champlain has left several varying accounts of this journey, and the following is one of two appearing in the Champlain Works series:

"The next day I saw Father Joseph . . . I spent some days with him, finding he was contemplating a journey to the Petun people, as I had thought of doing, although traveling is very troublesome in winter; and we set off together on (January) 15th to go to that tribe, where we arrived on the seventeenth of that month. These Petun people plant maize, which is called by us Turkey corn, and have a fixed abode like the rest. We visited seven other villages of their neighbours and allies, with whom we made friends . . . The country is full of hill slopes and little level stretches which make it a pleasant country. They were beginning to build two villages where we passed, in the midst of the woods, on account of the convenience of building and enclosing their towns there. These people live like the Attigouantans and have the same customs; they are near the Neutral Nation which is powerful and occupies a great extent of country. After visiting these people we set out from that place and went to a tribe of savages that we named Cheveux-releves who were very glad to see us again."[12](#)

Thus Champlain took two days to travel from Carhagouha to the first and probably principal Petun village. From the site of Carhagouha as now determined [13](#) to the Nottawasaga River near Wasaga Beach is 17 miles, about a full days walk in winter.[14](#) The first Petun village in consequence must have been a similar distance beyond the River, a total journey of not more than 34 miles or so, entirely inadequate to reach the tip of the Bruce Peninsula (117 miles) or even Owen Sound (67 miles). Champlain should have placed his "Gens de Petun" map notation further north and east and perhaps was restrained for lack of space to do so. After leaving the first village, he visited seven others and saw two under construction, and lastly met the Cheveux Releves, for which not a single clue concerning location and distance is given. The very lack of such details would imply

The land of the Petun was not only pleasant, full of hill slopes and little level stretches, but suitable for growing corn. These criteria surely do not describe the Bruce Peninsula, but do apply perfectly to those parts of Nottawasaga Township where the Huron Institute found and identified the village sites of the Petuns.[15](#) The southernmost and principal village, Ehwaé, is placed some 15 miles from Wasaga Beach corresponding adequately with our calculation, and from this site a chain of evenly-spaced, easily-reached villages extends north and west, parallel to the Nottawasaga River and Penetanguishene Peninsula shore. All these sites are there-fore within one day's walk of the Nottawasaga River and roughly equidistant from Wasaga Beach. In later Jesuit times, Ehwaé was

known to the missionaries as Saints Peter and Paul. Eight other villages in line were given saints' names terminating with Saints Simon and Jude, which the Huron Institute place at Craigeleith. The mission in line before reaching the latter was St. Matthias, or Ekarenniondi, where so many Algonquin Indians wintered with the Petuns that the Jesuits provided an Algonquin speaking missionary for this village.¹⁶ This village was the most westerly one known to Champlain,¹⁷ and if the Algonquins he met here were the Cheveux Releves, his marking them on his map west of the Petun is explained.

The findings of the Huron Institute are in perfect accord with Champlain's statements. Far from reaching the Bruce Peninsula, Owen Sound or the Saugeen, apart from entering the present Collingwood Township to reach one village, Ekarenniondi, his entire journey was within the confines of Simcoe County.

It is unfortunate that Father Jones relied so heavily on an inaccurate map in suggesting the Petuns were anywhere else at this time than where their villages had already been shown to have existed.¹⁸ The work of cartographers who were never in North America, relying on second-hand sources in dealing with past events in an abandoned forest on the other side of the world, obviously merits less attention than that of Champlain, Bressani and Brebeuf,¹⁹ who visited, lived and worked in the area and knew it intimately. Had Father Jones selected his map sources more carefully, the myth that Champlain visited the Bruce Peninsula would not have been created.

Endnotes

1. Jones, A. E., 1909. 8endake Ehen. Bur. of Archives, Toronto, p.219.

2. Fox, W. S., 1949. St. Ignace, Canadian Altar of Martyrdom pp.5-6.

Fox, W. S., 1952. The Bruce Beckons. p.27.

Landon, F., 1944. Lake Huron. p.131.

Long, M. H., 1942. A History of the Canadian People - Ne'v France. p.70.

Marquis, T. G., 1916. The Jesuit Missions. Chronicles of Canada series, Vol.4, p.22.

Middleton, J. E. & Landon, F., 1927. The Province of Ontario - A History. p.7.

3. Bourne, E. G (Ed.) 1911. The Voyages and Explorations of Samuel de Champlain (1604-1616). Trailmakers of Canada series, Vol.2, p.99 (footnote).

Dix, E. A., 1903. Champlain, the Founder of New France. Map facing p.166.

4. Bishop, M., 1948. Champlain, The Life of Fortitude. End-map. Syme, R., 1952. Champlain of the St. Lawrence. p.146.

5. for example:-Berry, G. L., 1967. Samuel de Champlain, father of New France.

Colby, C. W., 1915. The Founder of New France; a Chronicle of Champlain. Chronicles of Canada series, Vol.3.

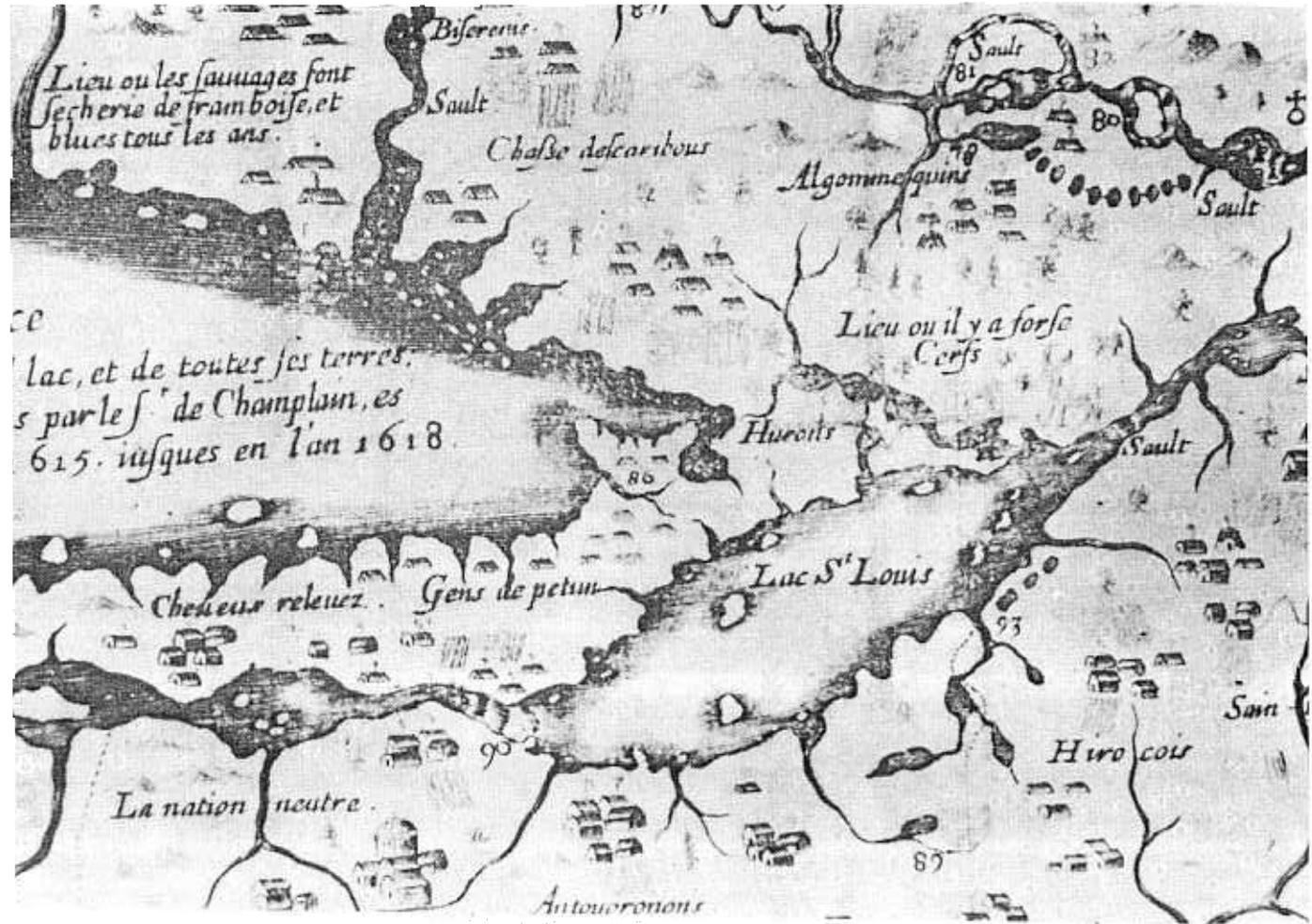
Dionne, N. E., 1909. Champlain.

Tharp, L. H., 1946. Champlain, North-West Voyager.

6. Jones, A. E., 1909. p.228.

7. Biggar, H. P. (ed.), 1922-1936. The Works of Samuel de Champlain. 6 vols. The quoted passage is from Vol. 3, pp.121-2, with footnote 2 on page 122. A similar passage appears also in Vol.4, pp.301-2, where the footnote is no.1 on page 302.

- 8.** Hunter, A. F., 1889. French Relics from Village Sites of the Hurons. In Annual Report of the Canadian Institute Session 1888-9. pp.42-6.
- 9.** Lee, T. E., 1959. An Archaeological Survey of Southwestern Ontario and Manitoulin Island Pennsylvania Archaeologist, vol. XXIX(2), August 1959, pp.80-92.
- 10.** Fox, W. S., 1952. p.27.
- 11.** Heidenreich, C. E., 1966. Maps Relating to the First Half of the 17th Century and their use in determining the Location of Jesuit Missions in Huronia. The Cartographer, 3(2), December 1966, pp.103-126. p.105.
- 12.** Biggar, H. P., (ed.), 1922-1936. This passage is found in Vol.3, pp. 94-96. The corresponding passage in Vol.4, pp. 278-9 gives differing dates. There are other published versions also, but Father Jones' conclusion after their examination coincides with the quoted passage. See Jones, A. E., 1909. p.273
- 13.** Heidenreich, C. E., 1966. p. 117 (map).
- 14.** See the calculations concerning Father Noel Chabanel in similar winter conditions, Jones, A. E., 1909. p. 236 (footnote). that he traveled no great distance and without hardship, and was still in the general area and thus easily found when a messenger arrived requesting his return.
- 15.** Lawrence, J., Gaviller, M., & Morris, J., 1909. Exploration of Petun Indian Village Sites. Huron Institute Papers & Records, vol.1, pp. 11-18, and map.
- 16.** All data concerning the Jesuit Missions to the Petuns, the names of the Villages and the provision of the Algonquin speaking missionary is originally drawn from the Jesuit Relations of several years and a letter by Father Charles Garnier all conveniently summarized by Father Jones. See Jones, A. E., 1909. pp.223, 317 and 322.
- 17.** The one more westerly village, known only by the Jesuit name Saints Simon & Jude, is at Craigleith quite near the shore and a visit to this location would have resulted in a more accurate delineation of the shoreline on Champlain's map.
- 18.** Dr. David Boyle had already identified the Nottawasaga Township village sites as those of the historic Petun twenty years before Father Jones' publication. See Boyle, D. 1889. Archaeological Report. Annual Report of the Canadian Institute, Session 1888-9, pp.4-15.
- 19.** An excellent review of all the pertinent maps may be found in Heidenreich, C. E., 1966. That Father Jean de Brebeuf drew part of one of the maps is not certain (p.114).



PORTION OF CHAMPLAIN'S MAP

The Huronia portion of Champlain's 1632 map shows the Penetanguishine Peninsula, which Champlain has marked with the figures "86". No land body representing the Bruce Peninsula is indicated. The "Gens de petun" is placed south-west of the Nottawasaga River, which may be seen below the figures "86", and ten villages are shown. From this point west, the southern Georgian Bay shore appears entirely hypothesised.