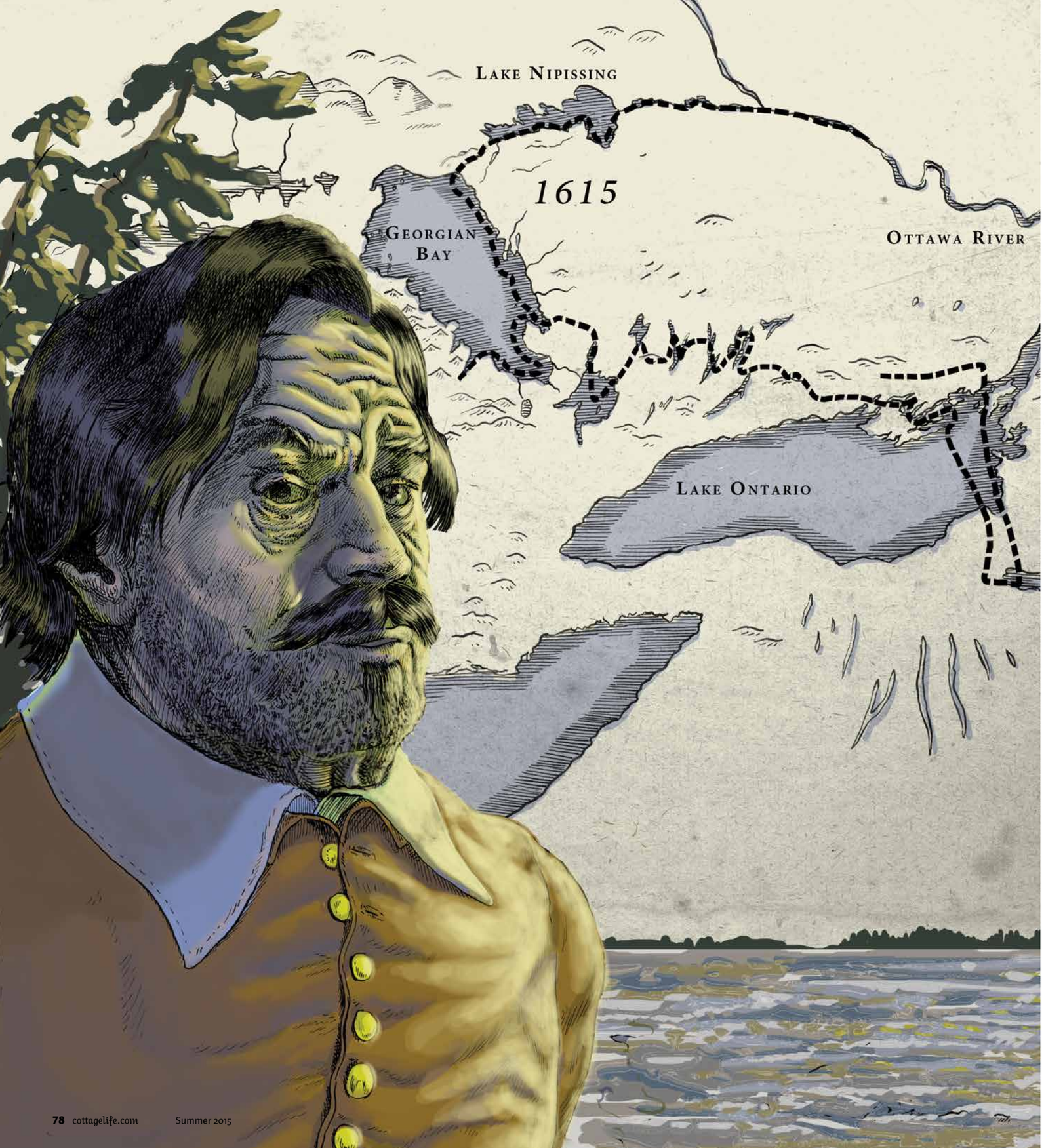



# WHO'S THAT MAN?

Illustration Ben Clarkson

The first cottager or a marauding invader? Samuel de Champlain's influence in 1615 is still being debated 400 years later. Charlotte Gray, Joseph Boyden, and Douglas Hunter present three different perspectives of the first European in Ontario cottage country on this momentous anniversary

By Charlotte Gray

# 1615: A SPACE ODYSSEY

The rocky pink islands of Georgian Bay, aglow in vivid sunsets. The sparkling, shallow waters of the French River and the tree-fringed lakes in the Kawarthas. Stands of majestic pines, their needle-heavy boughs rippling in the wind.

That's what we love about Ontario's cottage country, right? This is our "wilderness." We overlook the buzz of Jet Skis and the invasive species everywhere so that we can wallow in the idea that we are communing with nature. We assume that our summer sojourns on this landscape are surface scratches on its immutable ecology.

Not so. Southern Ontario was once covered in first-growth oak, birch, maple, and pine forests. And people have been resculpting this landscape for centuries.

In 1615, when the French cartographer and soldier Samuel de Champlain made his epic trip through this region—the first European to circle from the Ottawa River to Lake Ontario via Lake Huron—he did not kid himself that he was looking at virgin wilderness. He saw signs of human habitation almost everywhere.

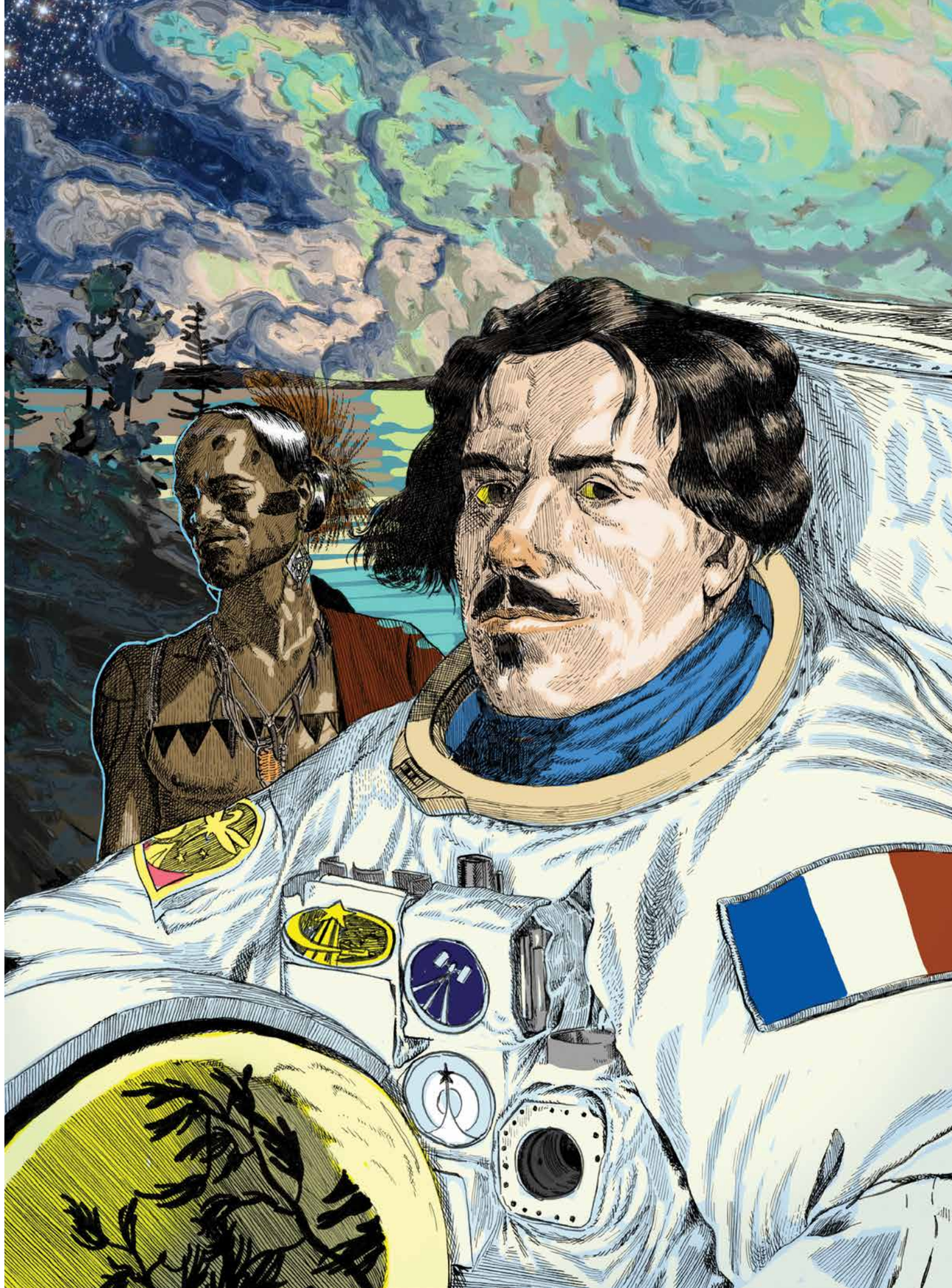
Space is space whether on the ground or in the sky, and Samuel de Champlain reminds me a little of our astronaut Chris Hadfield—a space traveller who delights in learning about people and making friends. Champlain's space comprised the vast areas from North America's eastern seaboard to the Great Lakes. In his lifetime (*circa* 1574-1635), he made at least 27 voyages from France to the New World. He was both a dreamer and a doer, determined to establish a French colony in North America in which both First Nations and European settlers would prosper. A stocky, muscular, dark-bearded man (if the only known portrait of him is correct), the "Father of New France" faced danger fearlessly and took careful notes.

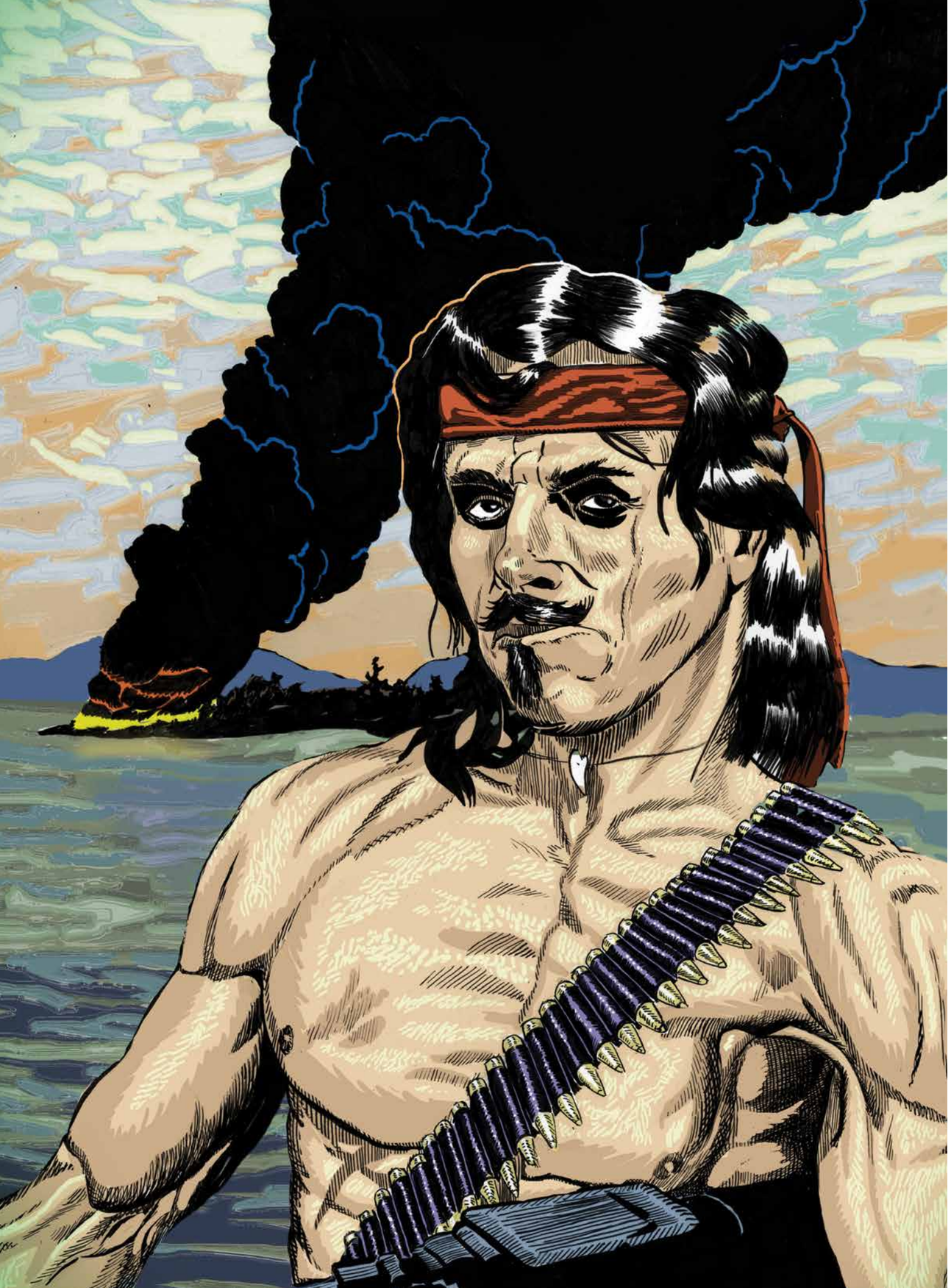
The first part of his 1615 journey took him up the Ottawa River, then across the Canadian Shield into Georgian Bay. This was the toughest leg of the trip: the forty-ish explorer, his interpreter, a servant, and 10 Algonquin guides must have had a wretched time paddling and portaging two large canoes through, in his words, "an ill-favoured region…barren and uninhabited," full of "rocks and mountains." Only the abundance of blueberries raised his spirits. At first glance, it seems much the same today. But a closer look at the map reveals that, thanks to a mining frenzy 300 years after Champlain struggled across the land, tailings piles and abandoned rail lines now lurk beneath the tangled undergrowth.

When our explorer reached Georgian Bay, his heart sank: the water was not salty, so he knew he had not discovered the long-sought route to China. But after the blackflies and the brambles of sweaty portages on the Shield, it was a relief for his small party to reach open water. And the fishing! I'm afraid that, because of pollution and overfishing, these days anglers would be hard-pressed to come across a lake trout or pike of a size that the Frenchman caught. Champlain also enjoyed meeting the local residents and, being a jovial, friendly fellow, telling them how much he admired their carefully styled dark hair—"raised very high, and arranged and combed better than our courtiers."

Where are those Wendat people—the "Cheveux-Relevés" ("High Hairs"), he called them—today? Disappeared from this region, along with the lake sturgeon that were nine feet long: "a very large fish and marvelously good eating."

For a contemporary Canadian, the most surprising part of Champlain's travel journal deals with the region now called Huronia, which stretches from the southern tip of Georgian Bay, north of Orillia, to Lake {*Continued on page 122*}





# DON-DE-DIEU

By Joseph Boyden

In July of 1609, Samuel de Champlain, along with a small group of French soldiers and a band of Wendat, fought a much larger group of Haudenosaunee in what is presently upstate New York. Using his harquebus, a weapon new to the Native world, Champlain killed two Haudenosaunee chiefs with one shot. The Haudenosaunee fled, and in the blood of their dead a new alliance of the Wendat and the French was made.

In the next decades, what I call one of the world's first arms races erupted as these two great Native nations vied for control of the very lucrative trade with the strange and alien empires from across the great water. The Haudenosaunee made an alliance with the Dutch, who were more than willing to supply them with as many of these deadly new weapons as they could afford. But Champlain and the French feared the Wendat obtaining too much firepower and were very careful in controlling the trickle of weapons. Instead, they supplied the Wendat with Récollet, then Jesuit missionaries come from France and put in charge of saving the souls of these *sauvages*.

I often wonder if the Wendat would have made this alliance with Champlain if they had known what was to happen to them 40 years later. The European name for Wendat is Huron, and in March of 1649, the Huron were finally overrun and scattered to the winds by the Haudenosaunee, who Europeans call Iroquois. Estimates of the Huron population at the height of their powers in the 1600s range from 20,000 to 40,000 souls. Within a couple of decades of Champlain sending French missionaries to the Huron city states of Southern Ontario, their population was whittled down, mostly due to European-borne disease, to maybe 10,000. Three in four Huron met a painful and horrible death from illnesses such as smallpox and scarlet fever. This, combined with Champlain's refusal to properly arm the Huron against their enemy, is the reason historians offer for the devastating overthrow of the once mighty Huron empire.

But I don't mean for this to be simply a history lecture. For many years I worked on a novel called *The Orenda*, which captures the rise and fall of the Wendat. As much as I'm fascinated by history, I'm loath to speak about such brilliant beings as the Wendat and the Haudenosaunee from a distant perspective, from a vantage point that suggests that either is simply a relic of the past. The Wendat today survive in Quebec and as the Wyandotte people of Oklahoma. And of course the Haudenosaunee, the Iroquois, are not just some of the world's greatest warriors but also the creators of the Great Law of Peace, a doctrine used in large part as a model for the U.S. Constitution.

And of course Samuel de Champlain will live on in monuments and in history books, in street and college names. Just as I wonder if the Wendat would have questioned their alliance, I also wonder if Champlain would have questioned his side of the bargain had he known what was in store. He died on Christmas Day of 1635 and would not have known the coming destruction of a people he helped set into motion two and a half decades before. There's plenty of debate as to what he pictured as the endgame of his attempt to Christianize the *sauvages* he became friends with. Yes, he must have known that he was tearing apart the cultural fabric of a people when he sent his soldiers of Christ in to wage their holy war. After all, his firm belief that his culture was far superior to those with which he came into contact in "the new world" sadly still exists in so many quarters of this nation today. But complex and complicated and advanced civilizations already existed here before the arrival of the first Europeans. Both the Wendat and the Haudenosaunee were humans with human wants and human desires, and yes, human faults too.

On one of Champlain's first voyages to the New World, he arrived on a ship named *Don-de-Dieu*, the Gift of God. And it seems clear to me that this is exactly what he felt he was bringing to that foreign and frightening and massive place. I believe that there's great irony in that name, especially considering the eventual near-annihilation of a people who were his allies. But I'll let you, dear cottager, decide for yourself.

*Joseph Boyden's books include* Three Day Road *and* Through Black Spruce.

By Douglas Hunter

# THE MACCALLUM CHAMPLAIN

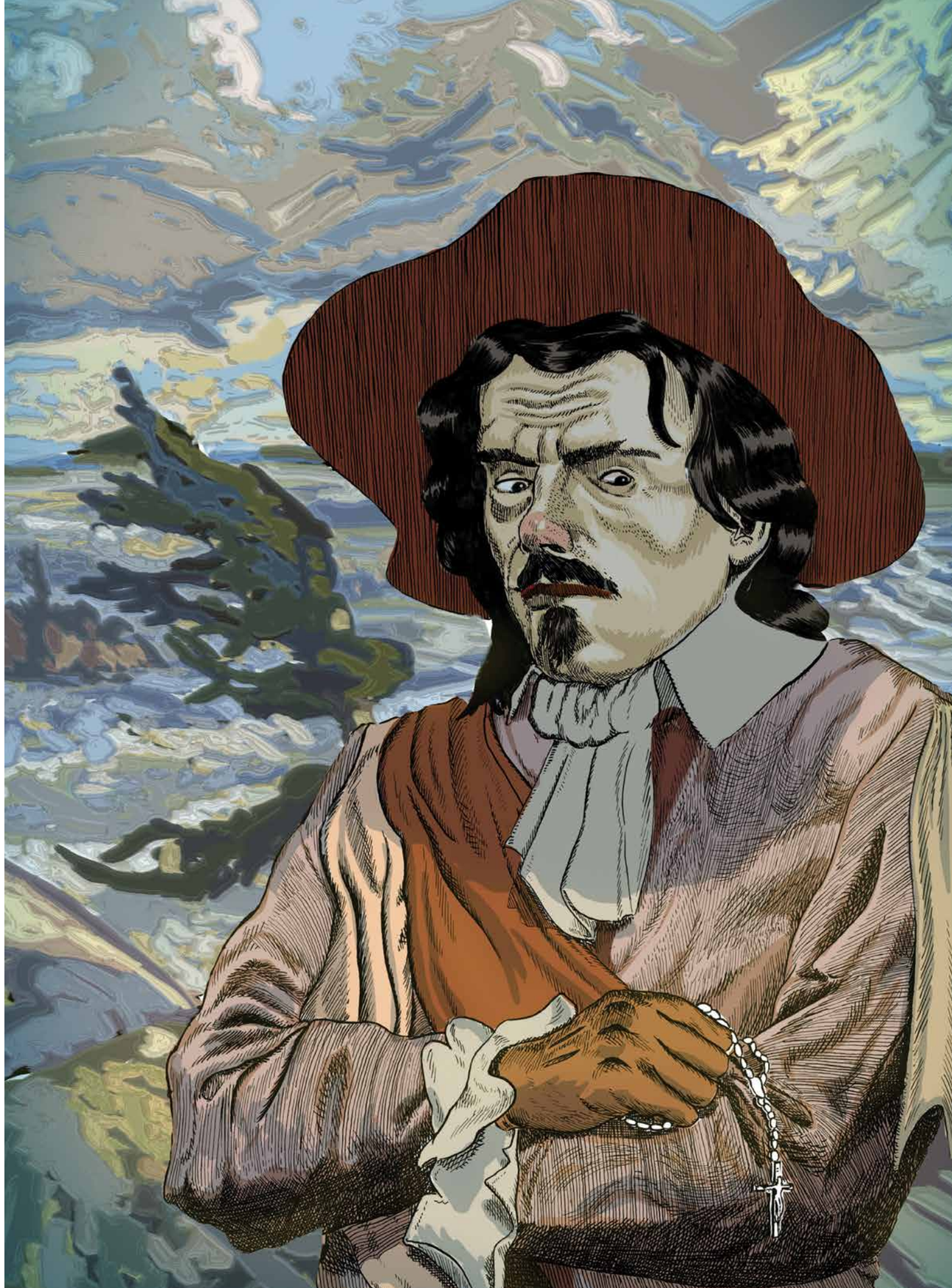
It's funny how your memory can play tricks where art is concerned. When I'm in Ottawa, I usually visit the National Gallery of Canada, and I always see the panels from the MacCallum cottage that feature Samuel de Champlain. Toronto ophthalmologist James MacCallum was a benefactor to a group of Toronto-based landscape painters who would visit his cottage on Go Home Bay on eastern Georgian Bay. Several of them would go on to become members of the Group of Seven, and MacCallum had the bright idea of having his guests essentially pay their room and board by contributing decorative interior panels. James Edward Hervey (J.E.H.) MacDonald, who was an experienced commercial illustrator as well as one such future Group of Seven member, drew the prime assignment of filling the panels on either side of the fireplace. In 1915-16 MacDonald created a tableau known today as *Inhabitants of Go-Home Bay*. The panel on the right, *The Present*, features a contemporary indigenous hunter with a rifle, a commercial fisherman, and an axe-sporting woodsman. The panel on the left, *Times Past*, depicts four figures in the rock-and-pine landscape: Samuel de Champlain, a Wendat man, a priest, and a Wendat child. The priest (likely Récollet) is seated on a rock with his back turned, dangling a crucifix before the wide-eyed child. I have a feeling that MacDonald was suggesting some hypnotic conversion was going on.

As I recalled the panel, MacDonald had portrayed Champlain in the finest tradition of pictorial swagger. Portraits of him since the 19th century usually are a cross between one of Dumas' Three Musketeers and a lost cousin of the pirate on the Captain Morgan rum bottle (we actually have almost no idea what he looked like). But the last time I viewed the painting, I saw a different Champlain, sombre as he eyes the priest and the child with his arms crossed. Supervising or judging? It is hard to say, but Champlain doesn't seem happy about what's going on.

Champlain was a key figure in the MacCallum panels because he would have paddled by on his journey to Wendake (Huronia) in 1615-16 and because the tercentenary of that visit was being marked as MacDonald painted. Champlain's fame in Canadian history was never greater. In the rising nationalism born in the 19th century, countries forged supportive historical narratives, and for a young Canada, Champlain filled the role of a founding father. It's a curiosity of Canadian history that Protestant English Canada so embraced Champlain, an arch-Catholic Frenchman who only visited what became Ontario twice, in 1613 and 1615-16.

Ontario wanted Champlain as a founding father, but on the MacCallum cottage wall, MacDonald created a version of him at odds with the heroic poses he usually strikes, in a scene that foreshadows the Wendake tragedy of death and dispersion after the coming of the Black Robes. I still cannot decide whether Champlain's face conveys authoritarian approval of the priest's proselytizing or pensive disquiet rooted in some foreknowledge of the misery and tragedy he is about to unleash by insisting that the Wendat accept priests among them as a condition of trade. We should be no less ambivalent about what we are celebrating on this 400th anniversary of Champlain's visit.

*Douglas Hunter wrote* God's Mercies, *about the exploration rivalry between Henry Hudson and Samuel de Champlain.*



**SWEET TEMPTATION**
{*Continued from page 76*}

Tearing down to build new would have solved their problems. But "we feel we're custodians here—we're responsible for this original 1885 cottage," Jim says. So the family turned to Toronto-based Solares Architecture, a firm whose work they'd seen in a magazine and that they had considered for renovations at The Swamp. Solares was still in its infancy at the time, but something about the outfit's young partners, the husband-and-wife team of Christine Lolley and Tom Knezic, and their thoughtful ideas about sustainable residential design, inspired Cathy and Jim's confidence.

"I remember being really excited," says Knezic of the project. "But it was one of the most complex buildings we'd seen, not because of the scale but because none of the rooms aligned with the others." He adds with a laugh, "Fortunately, we have powerful modelling software."

"The trend in Muskoka is to tear down," says Lolley, "but we would have had to conform to the current setbacks." And everyone was in agreement there: the cottage's proximity to the water was one of its best features. They decided to take the place apart and redesign and restore it on the same footprint. Their goals included improving the flow, brightening the interior, increasing efficiency, and reusing materials where they could to retain the feeling of the old cottage. "We wanted the building to look like it hadn't even been renovated," says Knezic.

By looking at the cottage as a whole, exploring the ways the family likes to live there—how and where they like to congregate, how they use various spaces, how many people they need to accommodate—Knezic and Lolley were able to take the building's original envelope and reconfigure it for modern family life. "We were correcting history a little bit," says Knezic. "We rebuilt it the way it should have been originally." From the outside, you can hardly tell the 130-year-old cottage has had a major overhaul. But inside, the place has become a functional and much-loved family gathering place. Let the memories begin.

*Toronto-based writer Jennifer David is a passionate Stony Lake cottager.*

**WHO'S THAT MAN?**
{*Continued from page 80*}

Ontario, near Belleville. Champlain described the land as "a well-cleared country…fair and fertile" and "peopled with a countless number of souls"—by his estimate, at least 30,000. Vast cornfields surrounded the well-fortified settlements: Huronia was the breadbasket of other indigenous nations. It also produced squashes and sunflowers, plums and berries. Champlain particularly admired the way that the Huron, as he called the Wendat, were "covered in the pelts of deer and beaver, which they acquired from Algonquins and Nippissing for Indian corn and meal."

He makes southeastern Ontario sound like Holland, doesn't he? An intensively cultivated territory, thickly peopled by savvy traders. Yet two centuries later, British settlers found an "empty land" awaiting discovery and conquest. European diseases and conquest had devastated the Wendat, and most of their land had reverted to bush—the same backwoods tangle of trees and scrub that Susanna Moodie called a "dark prison."

Today, this region has changed again. Beyond the sprawl of the Golden Horseshoe, small towns and holiday properties cling to the shores of gurgling rivers and gin-clear lakes. On a recent visit to Stony Lake near Peterborough, I talked to a cottager who recalled his mother boasting that Champlain had been there in late August 1615. "She claimed that he had planted yellow day lilies along the shore as he paddled through." Perhaps: Champlain was a great gardener who loved roses and fruit trees, and Stony Lake's day lilies are a striking chrome yellow. But it isn't the same shoreline. When the Trent-Severn Waterway was being built in the late 19th century, the water level at Stony Lake was raised six feet.

The only elements in our cottage country that the 17th-century space traveller might recognize are the blueberries and the day lilies. Subsequent generations of settlers, miners, farmers, builders, and anglers have remodelled everything else.

*Charlotte Gray is the author of nine non-fiction books. Her most recent,* The Massey Murder, *has won four awards.*