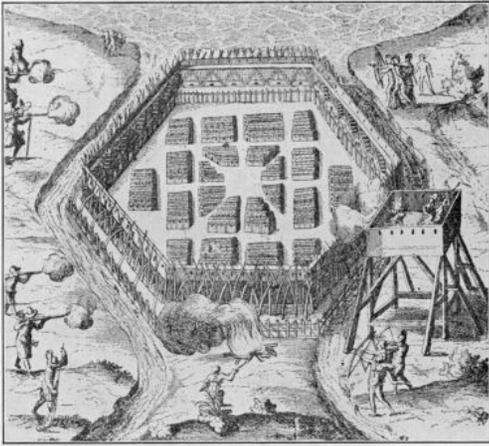


1615 EXPEDITION

In September 1615, Champlain and the Wendat planned a joint attack on an Onondaga Iroquois fortress. Brûlé volunteered to go south with a party of Wendat to bring reinforcements from an allied village. He arrived too late to help and Champlain had already departed the field two days earlier after taking an arrow in the knee.



THE ONONDAGA FORT
(From Champlain's diagram)

Champlain's drawing of the Iroquois fort

DISAPPEARANCE

Champlain did not see Brûlé again until 1618, at an accidental encounter. Champlain demanded an explanation for Brûlé's apparent failure to return. Brûlé then told him about his long journey to the south, the people he encountered, the rivers and lakes he traveled and his capture and torture by the Seneca. From his description we can infer that he traveled from Lake Simcoe down the Humber River into Lake Ontario and then further south. Champlain thought that Brûlé was "more to be pitied than blamed" and gave him his blessing to continue his travels.

FURTHER READING

The tragedy of Étienne Brûlé was that he was a man of all nations, but a man with no nationality of his own. He was many things to people over time. To Champlain in 1610 he was a brave and adventurous boy. By 1615 he had become a seasoned interpreter and trusted scout. To the missionaries he was a vicious wastrel; to the Wendat he was a companion and compatriot. When he returned to France in 1626 he was listed as a merchant, but by the time he returned to Quebec City in 1628 he was seen as a vile traitor.

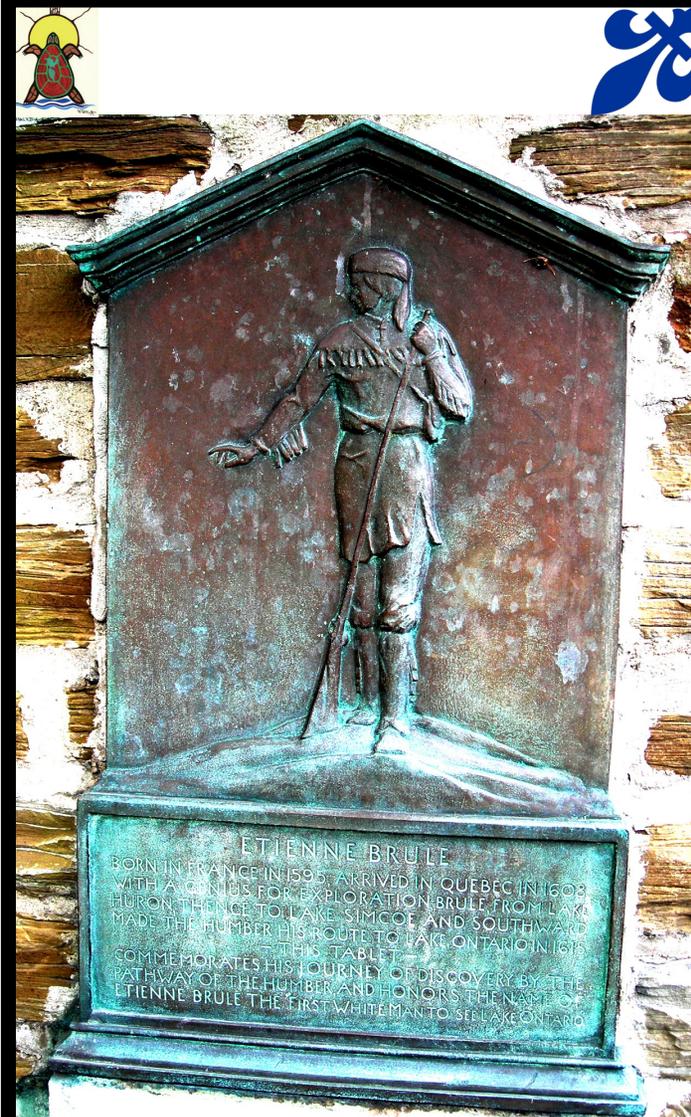
Brûlé was ultimately rejected by both the French and Wendat but to this day we cannot form a clear judgement of his character. We can only piece together his life from scraps of records left by Champlain and the missionaries.

None of these sources can be entirely trusted, because those writing them were influenced by patriotism and religion. We are still a long way from being able to paint a complete picture of Brûlé from the sketches we have left.

There is much work to be done, to fill in the historical record. New documents concerning Brûlé, unearthed as recently as 2010 provide insights on his trips to France. While we personally cannot go back in time, there is always more research to be done; always more to learn.



By Champlain (published in 1613.)



ÉTIENNE BRÛLÉ

1591-1632



THE EXCHANGE

In the summer of 1608 Samuel de Champlain and a ragged band of 28 men arrived at the site of a small fortress established almost 70 years before by legendary French explorer Jacques Cartier. Only 9 of them survived the rampant scurvy and small pox afflicting them that first brutal winter. One of them, but a boy, our man, Étienne Brûlé. Two years later, this youngster asked Champlain's permission to live with the natives. Champlain was enthusiastic about this project, entrusting Brûlé to the Algonquin chief Iroquet in exchange for a young Wendat named Savignon. Iroquet and his people overwintered in Wendake and it was here that Brûlé began his exploits with the Wendat.

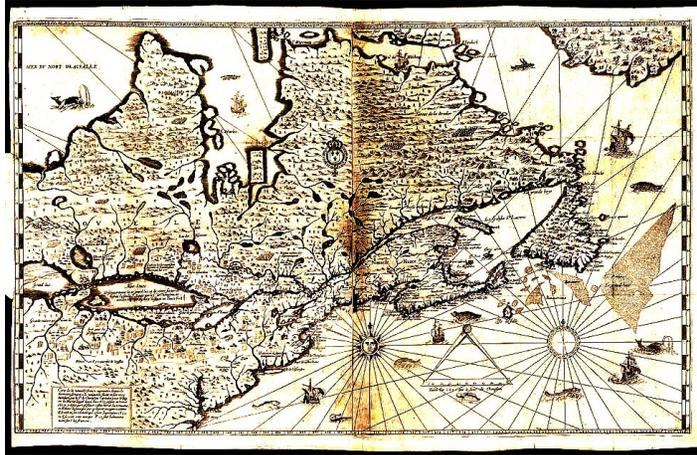
THE TRANSLATOR

Brûlé quickly became fluent in both the Wendat and Algonquin tongues. When Brûlé and Champlain met again a year later, Champlain was impressed with Brûlé's progress, later recording that "My lad . . . had learned their language very well." His skill as a truchement was so singular that he assisted the missionary Gabriel Sagard to compile the first French-Wendat dictionary in

1624. He received little recognition for his invaluable translation skills and was instead criticised by the missionaries for his impiety.

BRÛLÉ'S TRAVELS

Brûlé traveled far and wide with the Wendat after he reunited with Champlain. He likely was the first European to paddle the waters of four if not five of the Great Lakes. We know that he reached Lake Superior because Champlain was including the lake in his maps before he was ever there himself.



Champlain's Map of New France

While Brûlé has the distinction of being the first white European to travel the lakes and rivers in Ontario and what is today New York and Pennsylvania State, he did not permanently remain in Canada. He returned to France twice in the 1620s, bearing considerable wealth from the New World. He was able to afford two houses, marrying Alison Coiffier in 1627. Brûlé never felt comfortable in Europe and within a year he boarded a ship bound for Quebec to resume his life with the Wendat.

BETRAYAL AND DEATH

The circumstances surrounding his capture by the Kirke brothers and his later cooperation with them are hazy. We know that in 1628 he was captured on his way back to Quebec, and that Quebec City capitulated to the Kirke's in 1629.



Champlain on the Kirke's ship

Champlain was shattered. His beloved city had fallen, and seemingly, with the help of his favourite protege. However, as historians we must keep in mind the context surrounding these events. Brûlé never volunteered to help the Kirkes, but, as a prisoner, he was probably forced to cooperate under duress. This unfortunate incident deprived Brûlé of his true historical legacy, he was cast into ignominy for providing information while a captive of pirates and brigands. Champlain left for France and Brûlé left for Wedake. He had not long to live for the Wendat killed him in 1632. Thus passed Étienne Brûlé, and with his passing the world knew not what it lost.