
Huron Food and Food Preparation: How Accurately did Champlain and Sagard Relate the Facts?

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Abstract: Although archaeological techniques continue to improve, the lack of preservation of most organic artifacts leaves a gap in the archaeological record. Ideologies, motives and beliefs are obscured. As a result, interpretations of past events and cultural practices may be incomplete. The diaries and reports written by early post-contact European explorers and missionaries should be consulted, but used with caution. Louis Gottschalk's *Understanding History* is a guide to assessing the credibility and reliability of ethnohistoric sources. In this paper, the writings of explorer Samuel de Champlain and Recollet missionary Gabriel Sagard are evaluated, based upon Gottschalk's criteria, for their potential to relate accurate information about the dietary practices of post-contact Huron groups in southern Ontario. In addition, techniques from skeletal biology and more recent ethnographic analogy are suggested as further avenues for corroborating the archaeological and ethnohistoric information about Huron food and methods of food preparation.

This investigation assesses the credibility of ethnohistoric sources for reconstructing the diet and food preparation techniques of pre-contact southern Ontario Iroquoians. Since the term 'pre-contact' refers to the time before European contact, archaeological investigations have most often been used to learn about the practices of these people. Unfortunately, the archaeological record does not represent the full material remains of any culture, nor does it presume to offer direct insights into the beliefs and ideologies shared by the members of a pre-contact village group. Post-contact ethnographic sources, oral histories and experimental archaeology all provide very distinctive and valuable ways to gain different perspectives on the available information. When studying an ethnography for the purpose of extracting specific knowledge, a careful critique of its credibility and reliability must first be undertaken.

Two of the primary sources for descriptions of the Huron peoples during the early post-contact years come from the explorer Samuel de Champlain and the Recollet lay brother Gabriel Sagard. These men lived with the Huron and observed their

lifestyles during the years 1615-16 and 1623-24 respectively, presumably when these people were still largely unaffected by European beliefs. Their accounts, while considered to be invaluable sources, are different in purpose, style and content, and must both be evaluated for their potential to relate the 'historical facts' (past cultural practices or events which are being assessed for their objective accuracy) about the people whom they observed. Champlain's *Voyages of 1604-1618* (Grant 1907) and Sagard's *The Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons* (Wrong 1968) will be evaluated on the basis of Louis Gottschalk's (1969) criteria in *Understanding History*.

In 1933, Gottschalk first compiled a detailed guide containing those methods for undertaking historic research which he deemed the most appropriate and beneficial, and which he felt were generally accepted among historians (Gottschalk 1969: vii,ix). The methods described in the second edition, published thirty-five years later, remained largely unchanged as Gottschalk believed them to be valid following more than four decades of teaching and practical application (Gottschalk 1969: v). Gottschalk felt that other available textbooks dealing with historical method did not adequately aid students of history in judging the value of historic documents (Gottschalk 1969:vii,ix). *Understanding History* represents a thorough guide for interpreting the strengths and weaknesses inherent to primary historic sources, being the testimony of an eyewitness in either its original draft, as a later copy or as a printed edition (Gottschalk 1969:53,54), and is intended for the evaluation of such documents as the letters, diaries and accounts of the first Europeans in the Americas. In addition to this evaluation, comparisons between the ethnohistoric information, archaeological data and more modern ethnographic analogy will be drawn. Through this process, the potential for these early written sources to convey accurate information about the foods eaten and food preparation techniques employed by the pre-contact Late Ontario Iroquoians of southern Ontario will be established.

New France 1524-1624: The First Hundred Years of Contact

In the name of France, Verrazzano landed on a northern shore of North America in 1524. Exploration in this area of the New World seemed promising to the French monarchy who believed that material wealth was to be gained, and, perhaps more valuable at the time, that a direct route to Asia was waiting to be discovered (Trudel 1966a:27). Cartier's advancement up the St. Lawrence River in 1534 enabled relations to be initiated with Native settlements in the interior. However, France's colonizing efforts of the mid-1500's met with failure due primarily to the harsh climate of the winter months. Even in the 1580's, when the fur trade was being recognized as profitable, large-scale colonization was not possible despite serious efforts (Trudel 1996a:27).

By the turn of the seventeenth century, after nearly 80 years of contact, France had made slow but significant progress, namely:

France had learned to know the continent; here and there she had scattered place-names, which was a minor form of taking possession; the four winter seasons in the Laurentians were a valuable experience; she had established firm relations with the natives, and had introduced her products into the very heart of the continent (Trudel 1966a:28).

At the time of Champlain's arrival in 1603, some of the country had been explored, but the vast majority was still unknown territory. France had not yet gained ground with their attempts to 'evangelize' or 'civilize' the Natives (Trudel 1966a:28). Based upon reports by travellers such as Champlain, France was trying to decide whether claims should be made for the east coast or up the St. Lawrence River (Trudel 1966a:27).

Until 1615, trade was the sole purpose for the existence of Quebec. Champlain changed this by encouraging the Recollets to settle there and begin their preaching to the Natives (Trudel 1966a:28). At the time that the Recollet Father Gabriel Sagard crossed the Atlantic in 1623, there were still essentially no settlers in Quebec. The fur traders, with a handful of explorers and missionaries, constituted the colony of New France, while the English and the Dutch were establishing viable communities farther south (Trudel 1966a:29). Sagard was headed toward an area virtually devoid of other Europeans. In New France, both Champlain and Sagard would encounter experiences and peoples that few Europeans knew existed as of yet. They were among the first literate men to learn about the lifestyles of several Native settlements in what is now southern Ontario.

Samuel de Champlain's Visit with the Huron and His Accounts Regarding Their Dietary Habits

By 1608, Champlain had interacted with the Huron, largely with trading and war parties who passed through, or near to, Quebec. During this time, he indicated that he trusted certain chiefs to speak the truth, and considered them friends (Grant 1907:253). During the autumn of 1615, Champlain had been on a raid with the Huron to Iroquois country and was injured. His Huron hosts convinced him not to travel back to Quebec but rather to spend the winter in their settlement. Trudel (1966b:192) points out that Champlain "accepted, with much reluctance." Most of that winter, until May of 1616, Champlain lived among the Huron. Together with the Recollet Le Caron, visits were paid to nearby Petun and Ottawa settlements in order to invite the Natives to Quebec and to try to obtain information about the 'mysterious west' (Trudel 1966b:193; Grant 1907:312). Of the tribes that he contacted in southern Ontario, he noted in general that they all cultivated the soil although they spoke different languages and practised various lifestyles and customs (Grant 1907:311). In Champlain's words, he used this time "to observe their country, customs, dress, manner of living, the character of their assemblies, and other things which I should like to describe" (Grant 1907:310). According to Trudel (1966b:193), Champlain "has left us a detailed description of them which is an ethnographical compendium of the Huron country." While this statement is true in

general, Champlain's attention to detail, specifically regarding the types and amounts of food eaten by individuals, remains to be seen.

Champlain lists many of the animals found in the Great Lakes region, implying that the people were hunting "stags, caribous, elks, does, buffaloes, bears, wolves, beavers, foxes, minxes, weasels, and many other kinds," as well as fishing many varieties and hunting many types of birds (Grant 1907:311). Champlain does not quantify the relative importance of meat and fish in the overall diet, but does note that their principal food items were 'Indian corn' and 'Brazilian beans' prepared in many different ways (Grant 1907:314). Normally, the majority of the Huron ate two meals per day (Grant 1907:316).

Flour, produced from maize kernels crushed in a wooden mortar, was used to make either bread or soup. Ingredients often added to the maize mixture included beans, blueberries, raspberries, or pieces of deer fat, when available. The bread was either baked in the ashes of the fire, or wrapped in maize leaves and boiled (Grant 1907: 314,315). Champlain identified *migan* as the most common maize dish, which was made by boiling the pounded kernels with either fresh or dry fish for flavour. He noted that the bran was left in the maize and that all parts of the fish were included, although the appendages, scales and "inwards" were not to his personal taste (Grant 1907:315). The fish could be substituted with venison. The resulting mixture was thin in consistency and doubled as a beverage. A second recipe referred to as *migan* was prepared by roasting unripened maize and then cooking it with fish or meat, if available (Grant 1907:315).

Maize could also be prepared for cooking by soaking it in muddy water for two to three months. It was then either roasted or boiled with meat or fish. According to Champlain (Grant 1907:316), "the women and children take it and suck it like sugar-cane, nothing seeming to them to taste better, as they show by their manner." Besides maize, Champlain (Grant 1907:317) recorded that the Huron "eat many squashes" once they were boiled and roasted in the ashes. Dog and bear were reserved for banquets (Grant 1907:316). His narrative also indicates that, at times, the warriors ate their prisoners (Grant 1907:309). Of note, Champlain does not indicate either the sex or the general age of the warriors.

The Credibility of Champlain's Accounts

Was Champlain able to tell the truth?

According to Gottschalk (1969), one of the fundamental methods of determining the credibility of an author's words is to first confirm that the author was present to personally witness the events which he or she has described. This principle is termed 'nearness' and it applies to both time and space (Gottschalk 1969:151). In general, Champlain details his travels, the contents of his reports to his supervisors, and his participation in events such as war parties. Having experienced warfare during the 1590's back in Europe, it is believable that Champlain accompanied the Huron men in their raids of Iroquois territory (Grant 1907:3). Regarding

the foods eaten at the Huron settlements, it is also evident that Champlain was present for a period of four months worth of meals during the winter of 1615-16. He did not mention who was responsible for preparing the maize flour or who actually cooked the food; he simply referred to the chefs as "they" (Grant 1907:315). Nor did he mention whether or not all people in the village ate the same diet. It might be that children ate different foods than adults, or that adult women ate differently than adult men. These relationships are not alluded to in Champlain's account. These omissions cause one to question Champlain's direct presence during the preparation and cooking of meals. It may be that he partook in the eating of the food with the adult men only, and perhaps asked them how the food was made or what ingredients were included. If Champlain did not directly witness the preparation stage, it is possible that subtle methods or less obvious ingredients may have been omitted from his accounts. In addition, due to the timing of Champlain's visit (during the winter months), he probably missed the potential range of foods that were eaten by the Huron throughout the remainder of the seasons.

Gottschalk's (1969) definition of 'nearness' also includes the timing of the recording of the witness's observations. Although Champlain has been described as "accurate" with a "keen eye" (Grant 1907:4,6), he may have forgotten some of the detail if time had passed between the occurrence of the event and his recording of the event. There seems to be no indication in the historical literature as to Champlain's degree of devotion as a record-keeper. However, even if his daily routine included writing about that day's events, there is still no guarantee that his account would be true to the 'historical facts.' Based on his recollection of the events that he had witnessed, he would need to make some conscious and unconscious choices regarding the details that he would record. Thus, Champlain's competence as a historical witness must also be assessed.

Since Champlain's background was not that of the people he was observing, his cultural bias must be sought out within his work. Gottschalk (1969:15) points out that a chronicler, such as Champlain, can understand the actions (and, presumably, the intentions) of the people he is observing "only by analogy, comparison, or contrast with his own experience." It is important to have some sense of Champlain's frame of reference; his personal qualities and background would shape the ways in which he thought about the Huron and recorded their cultural practices.

The town of Champlain's youth was Brouage, located on the coast of France. Brouage was a principal exporter of salt during the sixteenth century, which was a lucrative trade due to the curing properties of this mineral (Bishop 1963:2). At that time, Brouage was a Protestant, or Huguenot, town. The Huguenots were then being persecuted in France for their religious reforms (Trudel 1966a:27). No concrete knowledge of Champlain's baptism or the religious beliefs of his parents can be located. His given name, Samuel, is considered to be a Protestant (as opposed to a Catholic) name (Bishop 1963:3). The religious context of his younger years likely played a role in shaping Champlain's world view, particularly if his family was subjected to religious discrimination.

Another mystery about Champlain's early life revolves around his family's socio-economic status. Whether Champlain was born into a poor fishing family, was the son of a naval captain, or even the illegitimate child of nobility, Trudel (1966b:

186) feels that this aspect of Champlain's life will never be known. Bishop (1963: 2,3) has digested the sparse bits of information, and feels it is most likely that Samuel's forebears were fishermen, and that his father was a sea captain who had probably attained his rank due to intelligence and persistence. Champlain had little formal education, but was trained in the art of sailing, and was raised in a town conscious of the land that lay on the other side of the ocean (Bishop 1963:2). A great deal more information is known about Champlain by the time he reached New France in 1603. Champlain was approximately 33 years old, professed belief in the Catholic faith, and was at the beginning of a career characterized by perseverance and upward mobility in his appointed positions (Bishop 1963:3).

Champlain's personality, shaped by more than 30 years of experiences, almost certainly influenced his observations and thoughts about the Huron and their customs. In his *Voyages*, Champlain freely offered his own opinions about the food prepared by the Huron. For instance, as Champlain described the dish known as *migan*, he stated, "They make it very often, although it smells badly, especially in winter, either because they do not know how to prepare it rightly, or do not wish to take the trouble to do so" (Grant 1907:315). Regarding the maize that had soaked in muddy water for several months Champlain added, "I assure you that there is nothing that smells so badly as this corn as it comes from the water all muddy" (Grant 1907:316). Not all of the dishes prepared by the Huron were disliked by Champlain. Maize that was roasted and then pounded into meal form was made to take on journeys. For Champlain, this food was "the best according to my taste" (Grant 1907:315-316). In *Voyages*, Champlain discussed only a handful of Huron dishes, and it seems likely that he recorded those food items that he noticed were most common or those that caught his attention. He may have failed to mention some of the less frequently eaten dishes or ingredients that were used only on occasion.

Was Champlain willing to tell the truth?

Champlain's willingness to tell the truth differs from his ability to do so. Gottschalk (1969:155) explains: "Authors, though otherwise competent to tell the truth, consciously or unconsciously tell falsehoods." While Champlain's inability to include certain details in his account would have led to the omission of information, other factors may have led to his unwillingness to record the truth, which would have led to misstatements or distortion of the facts (Gottschalk 1969:160). Champlain likely recorded those events and details which he thought were most important to the point he was trying to present. It is essential to evaluate his words based upon his character, his motivations and his intended audience.

Gottschalk (1969:156) cautions against the 'interested witness' whose purpose is to distort the truth to provide personal benefit. While attempting to extract the 'historical facts' about Huron food as conveyed in Champlain's work, it is difficult to conceive of any reason that Champlain might have had for intentionally distorting his observations about this aspect of their daily lives. This factor in assessing credibility seems to relate to that one involving the 'intended audience.' The intended audience of the writer's work could "lead to the colouring or the avoidance

of the truth” due to “the desire to please or to displease” (Gottschalk 1969:157). Champlain’s intended audience was most likely his superiors, who may have included the king, as well as the literate public in France who may have been interested in news from the New World. At that point in time, most of the world beyond Europe was unknown: “Little wonder that books were eagerly read which lifted the veil from some of these mysteries” (Wrong 1968:xx). Again, reasons for any distortion of the practices relating to food are not obvious.

One form of bias that likely affected Champlain’s willingness to tell the truth deals with the expectations that he may have brought with him to the Huron settlements. Gottschalk (1969:160) explains that this bias can lead a witness to obscure the truth in his or her account since “their eyes and ears are closed to fair observation; or because, seeking, they find; or because in recollection, they tend to forget or to minimize examples that do not confirm their prejudices and hypotheses.” Champlain offered an apparent predisposed opinion of Huron life in general: “Their life is a miserable one in comparison with our own; but they are happy among themselves, not having experienced anything better, and not imagining that anything more excellent is to be found” (Grant 1907:314). In this same train of thought, Champlain began to describe Huron food and some of their methods of food preparation. This leads the reader to wonder if, perhaps, Champlain was not expecting to find interesting culinary dishes and, therefore, did not spend much effort in attempting a thorough and accurate investigation of this facet of life within the settlements that he visited.

Champlain’s expectations may have been connected to the motivations for his visit among the Huron. When Champlain first arrived in New France, he was convinced that Acadia would be a more profitable venture for France than locations farther inland. He became quite familiar, and apparently friendly, with several Native groups in the coastal regions (Trudel 1966a:28). However, the prospect of discovering access to Asia in the west had spurred Champlain to explore the St. Lawrence and other inland river systems. Champlain seemed to hold prosperous plans for the future of this area. As Trudel (1966a:29) relates: “Gradually Champlain became a colonizer. His explorations in 1609 and 1613, his winter season with the Huron country in 1615-16, and the evidence of the other European settlements, convinced him of the rich potentiality of a vast empire.” It seems apparent that Champlain’s main driving force was colonization and profit-making through the exploitation of resources, and the goal of discovering the passage to the Western sea. If Champlain’s plan included conversion of all Natives to French religion and laws, he may have been more interested in their modes of social conduct and legal system, rather than what they were eating. This, however, is speculation, since Champlain did not record in writing any reason to spy on the Huron.

An attempt to determine the dietary habits of the Huron through Champlain’s work is further complicated by a language barrier. Although Champlain had been in contact with Huron people for many years, he still did not have a firm grasp of their language when he arrived for his stay in 1615 (Heidenreich 1972:8). This French-Iroquoian obstacle could have caused Champlain to misinterpret what was

being told to him regarding foods and their preparation. This problem was further aggravated once Champlain's *Voyage* was translated from French into English. Grant (1907:11), the editor of the translated version, attests to the extreme accuracy of the translation. While this may be true, Garrad (1995:18) noticed in another context that certain translators of Champlain's work have been influenced by prior translations regarding the words they choose, which may or may not be literal meanings from Champlain's original statements. The translation of a phrase literally or based on the phrase's meaning in the original cultural context should be evaluated.

In summary, Champlain's visit to Huron settlements during the winter of 1615-16 did enable him to produce a brief, but valuable, account of dishes that were eaten, along with modes of preparation. He was, perhaps, not as focussed on obtaining specific information on food and what different individuals within the community were eating as he was on other aspects of Huron life. Heidenreich (1972:8) states this opinion concisely:

[Champlain's] observations on social, political and religious aspects of the Huron must be approached with caution not only because he worked through interpreters, but also because of his strong religious convictions and firm belief in French social and political institutions. Nevertheless his view of the Huron...is essentially sympathetic, accounting for the excellent rapport he established with them.

Grant (1907:10) believes that Champlain's "observations on the manners and customs of the Indians are also valuable, made as they were before contact with the white invader had changed and darkened the character of the red man. ...his account is marked with truth and sincerity." Although Grant's statement carries some bias of its own, it is his opinion, and should be taken into account with other evidence as to the likelihood of the transmission of 'historical facts' about Huron dietary habits through Champlain's testimony. Champlain's accounts need also be evaluated based upon independent testimony, such as that produced by Gabriel Sagard, and by corroboration through the archaeological record. These comparisons will be addressed throughout the remainder of this paper.

Gabriel Sagard's Mission Among the Huron and His Accounts Regarding Their Dietary Habits

Chapter VIII in Sagard's *The Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons* is entitled "How they clear, sow, and cultivate the land and then how they bestow the corn and meal, and their mode of preparing food" (Wrong 1968:103). Despite the

title, Sagard explained in more detail that each family subsisted on fishing and hunting as well as planting (Wrong 1968:103). Once harvested, the maize was hung to dry inside the longhouse and then shelled, cleaned and stored in casks. Sagard's description of the making of boiled bread, called *sagamité*, and the extra ingredients added for flavouring, was similar to Champlain's account excepting that Sagard also mentioned pumpkin, strawberries, blackberries, "and other small fruits, dried and fresh" (Wrong 1968:105,107). Once cooked, a little melted fat was sometimes added on top (Wrong 1968:107). Sagard, like Champlain, described the maize that had been soaked in water for two to three months, calling it "stinking corn," and associated the Huron's enjoyment of it with a European eating sugar-cane. This was a special dish saved for "feasts of great importance" (Wrong 1968:108). Sagard's personal opinion of this recipe was that "the taste and smell are very strong, and the stink worse even than sewers" (Wrong 1968:108).

Another maize bread recipe observed by Sagard was described as 'chewed bread.' The women, girls and children bit off unripened grains of maize and spit these into pots. These kernels were pounded, wrapped in maize leaves and baked under the ashes of the fire. Sagard wrote:

This chewed bread is the kind they themselves prize most, but for my part I only ate it of necessity and reluctantly, because the corn had in this way been half chewed, bruised, and kneaded by the teeth of the women, girls, and little children (Wrong 1968:105).

Other foods eaten by the Huron during Sagard's 1623-24 visit included boiled acorns and some types of roots. Certain tree bark, likely from one of the maple species, was sometimes eaten (Wrong 1968:108). In order to cook fish or meat, heated stones were placed into water in a kettle until the water was heated "and so cooked the meat to some extent" (Wrong 1968:109). Sagard seemed to infer that this process was insufficient to completely cook the meat. Sagard mentioned that meat was rarely eaten, and that fish was only eaten in small quantities (Wrong 1968: 106). Unlike Champlain, Sagard directly spoke of the relative importance (or lack thereof) of meat and fish in the general diet of the community, although he would not have seen first-hand whether or not their availability varied annually. Sagard infers that everyone had equal access to these resources, since he did not specify otherwise.

The Credibility of Sagard's Accounts

Was Sagard able to tell the truth?

The first concern that needs to be addressed, following Gottschalk's (1969) guidelines for assessing reliability, is to determine Sagard's nearness to the events and practices that he had described. Since Sagard's work is frequently cited as one of the 'top three' primary sources of information about the early post-contact Huron, it seems generally accepted that he was present for a short time among the Huron.

As to more precise events, Rioux (1966:591) notes that Sagard described events "which to a large extent" he witnessed. Here, Rioux provides a clue as to the authenticity of Sagard's information, as he notes that Sagard was not necessarily a primary witness for some of the details that he related in his works. In fact, Sagard had read Champlain's earlier accounts of the Native settlements in the area, and he tended to use Champlain's words in his own accounts without mentioning Champlain's name in association (Tooker 1991:6). However, Tooker (1991:6) clarifies: "This copying was not simple plagiarism: Sagard probably omitted those data he did not observe, expanding, contracting, and rearranging the text to suit his purpose." This tendency can be seen, with relation to Huron food, in the two men's descriptions of the 'stinking corn.' As Champlain described, "The women and children take it and suck it like sugar-cane, nothing seeming to taste better, as they show by their manner" (Grant 1907:316), while eight years later, Sagard wrote, "...licking their fingers as they handle these stinking ears, just as if they were sugar-cane" (Wrong 1968:108). If Tooker is correct, and Sagard witnessed this mode of preparation, then his words actually corroborate Champlain's account. Although maize soaked in muddy puddles would not survive in the archaeological record to offer additional evidence, it seems likely that the Huron did practice this custom during the early post-contact period, and possibly prior to European contact as well.

Sagard's notes should also be examined regarding proximity in time to the events that he described. During Sagard's winter with the Huron, he was apparently fairly dedicated to his journal. Wrong (1968:xiv-xv) relates, "[Sagard] was interested in everything. ... He must have made notes from day to day. Some he lost, but others were preserved, and he had besides a retentive and, on the whole, accurate memory." This statement is revealing. Wrong seems to feel that Sagard's attention to detail was great, and he concludes that Sagard must have made notes on a daily basis to achieve this precision. At the same time, we are told that some of Sagard's notes were lost at some point, and that he was required to rely on his memory in some cases. This problem likely resulted in the loss of detail, and possibly means that Sagard turned to the available writings of other travellers, such as Champlain or Lescarbot, to fill in the gaps in his accounts. Although it seems that Sagard's work can be perceived as accurate for the most part, it is not problem-free.

Less is historically known about Sagard's personal character than Champlain's and, as Wrong (1968:xiv) notes, "Beyond what is revealed in [Sagard's] books, we know little about him, and nothing of his parentage, of where or when he was born, or of his early life." The first document indicating Sagard's existence is in the form of a letter in 1604. Sagard was a Recollet friar by this time (Rioux 1966:590). In 1614 Sagard appeared again, living in Paris, as the private secretary to Father Chapouin, the provincial of the Recollets of Saint-Denis. Around this time, this provincial was being encouraged to send a few missionaries to New France. The first four whom he sent, in 1615, did not include Sagard, who was apparently disappointed with this decision, as he had spent time studying the language of the Huron and wished to go to New France (Rioux 1966:590; Wrong 1968:xiv,xvi). Of his own education, Sagard wrote, "I was brought up in the

school of the Son of God, under the rule and discipline of the Seraphic Order of St. Francis" (Wrong 1968:17). He seemed to have been well-read, as he frequently quoted from a wide range of authors such as Aristotle, Tacitus, Pliny and Marcus Aurelius (Wrong 1968:xiv). His position as the private secretary to the provincial of the Recollets suggests that he was quite literate and, presumably, well organized.

Other factors that might have influenced Sagard's ability to tell the truth include his age, his degree of expertise, and his narrative skill (Gottschalk 1969:151). Unfortunately, since his date of birth is not known, it would be difficult to estimate Sagard's age at the time of his meeting with the Huron. Perhaps he was fairly youthful, and this may have been part of the reason why the provincial did not send Sagard with the first wave of missionaries. Rioux (1966:592) informs that some scholars feel that Sagard's work was produced by a "naïve" and "superficial" mind. Although these characteristics are often associated with youth and inexperience, this is not always the case. Rioux (1966:592), on the other hand, evaluates Sagard as a "reliable, competent, and honest witness." Sagard's exact age during the winter of 1623-24 will likely never come to light.

Regarding Sagard's degree of expertise, it is probable that his Franciscan training did not specifically include topics such as identification of the indigenous flora and fauna of North America, but careful attention to the actions of his hosts and persistent questioning may have helped him to overcome this obstacle. His (at least) rudimentary knowledge of the Huron language would have greatly assisted him in his efforts to understand the actions of the food gatherers and food preparers (Wrong 1968:xvi). Sagard's narrative skill may have resulted from his enjoyment of literature. His account of Huron subsistence is quite thorough; he seemed to pay more attention to detail than did Champlain. In this regard, his account is conducive to relating some dietary practices of the Huron.

Was Sagard willing to tell the truth?

To reiterate, Gottschalk (1969:160) explains that the problems associated with willingness to tell the truth may lead to misstatements or distortions about dietary practices. These distortions, whether conscious or subconscious, can lead the historian astray. For the case of food, it is conceivable that the major problems would be associated with the omission of data if the chronicler failed to observe certain practices or felt little need to describe them in detail. However, it is worthy to examine factors that may have caused Sagard to misrepresent the 'facts.'

Since Sagard had read the published works by travellers like Champlain and Les-carbot (Rioux 1966:591), it is likely that he carried some preconceived notions of what he would find when he arrived in the New World. However, his observations regarding food practices were more detailed than Champlain's, which indicates that Sagard initiated his own study of this subject. From the standpoint of the 'interested witness,' it is unlikely that purposeful distortions of the facts pertaining to subsistence would have personally benefited Sagard in any means.

As for Sagard's motives, he wrote, "I had embarked with the intention of going to win souls for our Lord in the country of the savages, and to endure martyrdom there if such was His sacred pleasure" (Wrong 1968:22). That Sagard used the term 'savages' in this context does not, in itself, imply that he considered or expected them to be his inferiors, since this term was used widely among writers of his day to refer to non-Europeans. He did, however, mention that his account exposed "the wretchedness of human nature, tainted at the source, deprived of the training of the faith, destitute of morality, and a victim of the most deadly barbarism..." (Wrong 1968:18). It is clear that Sagard's primary motivation was to aid in the conversion of the Huron to Christianity and thus "free them from enslavement to the devil...and to civilize their savagery with the refinement of moral principles" (Wrong 1968:18).

Sagard was not completely centred on the religious aspects of Huron life, however, as was the tendency of the Jesuits. In fact, Tooker (1991:6; emphasis added) relates that "Champlain's and Sagard's accounts of religion are grossly inadequate, but...both deal extensively with aspects of Huron culture slighted by the Jesuits (particularly the life cycle, descent, and *subsistence techniques*)." Heidenreich (1972:8) feels that Sagard's writings were "almost free of moralizing." Relatively speaking, for his day, Sagard seemed to be a fairly objective observer. Tooker (1991:6) adds that "Unlike Champlain, [Sagard] did not seek to lead men or change their destinies, but rather recounted only what he saw and did." She describes Sagard as a participant-observer and, most flatteringly, states: "Sagard perhaps resembled most closely the modern anthropologist."

Seeking Corroboration for Champlain's and Sagard's 'Facts'

During excavations at a late sixteenth century Huron village known as the Benson site, the burial of an infant was uncovered. The infant had been accompanied by grave goods; namely, a bone awl, a freshwater clam valve, four marten paws, and a small ceramic body sherd (Ramsden and Saunders 1986:21). In order to aid in the interpretation of this burial, Ramsden and Saunders (1986:24) consulted with the ethnohistorical work written by Sagard. In his account, Sagard (1865:117 cf. Ramsden and Saunders 1986:24) mentioned that a child's ears were pierced with a bone awl and the child was given grease or oil to swallow immediately after delivery. Ramsden and Saunders (1986:24) speculate that the burial they uncovered represented the remains of a stillborn, who was wrapped in a marten skin, and placed in the grave along with the instruments that had been gathered for the neonatal ritual. Although there is no unquestionable proof for this scenario, the process illustrated by Ramsden and Saunders (1986) demonstrates the potential for archaeological data and ethnohistoric sources to corroborate the information provided by each source.

Archaeological investigations have uncovered evidence for the first appearance of

maize in southern Ontario, and have traced the shift from gathering and hunting subsistence strategies to the sedentary lifestyle associated with dependence on cultivated crops which many Native societies engaged in beginning around A.D. 700 (Wright 1972:57; Wright 1966:81). Direct evidence of plant and animal food is often preserved in the archaeological record in the form of charred kernels and seeds, pollen, animal bones, and residue on the inner walls of cooking pots. The variety of foods eaten by the Huron included maize, beans, squash, sunflower seeds, wild plum, raspberry, perch, bass, sucker, catfish, duck, goose, grouse, passenger pigeon, white tail deer, ground hog, squirrel, beaver, raccoon, muskrat, elk, black bear, fox, dog, turtle, and frog (Ramsden 1990:380; Wright 1966:73). Maize was identified as the primary staple in the diet, while "beans, squash, sunflower, and wild vegetable and animal foods were definitely of a supplementary nature by the historic period" (Wright 1966:81).

Although plant and animal remains are recovered and analysed, their mere presence does not necessarily mean that these items were being eaten. For instance, birds may have been hunted for feathers rather than for consumption (Ramsden 1990: 380). Moreover, the existence of food remains on a site does not reveal much about specific recipes or ingredient substitutes, the people's preferences for certain dishes, or ceremonial uses for specific foods. Ethnohistoric accounts, such as those provided by Champlain and Sagard, not only contain descriptions of the foods that are being recovered through archaeological excavation, but also provide much more detail regarding dietary practices.

Evidence of dietary components is also gathered through chemical analyses of human skeletal remains. While the stable carbon isotopes found in bone tissue provides the specialist information regarding the proportions of certain plant types in the diet, stable nitrogen isotopes reveal information about sources of protein, such as beans and animal flesh (Katzenberg *et al.* 1995:336). An analysis of the bone tissue from individuals who lived at the proto-Huron Woodbridge-McKenzie Site indicated that, by A.D. 1500, maize was the principal food source, and they seemed to have a higher proportion of beans in their diet than meat (Katzenberg *et al.* 1995: 345,347). As described by Katzenberg and colleagues (1995:335), "Stable isotope data provide one source of evidence for changes in human subsistence patterns and their interpretation relies on complementary data from sources such as the analysis of faunal and botanical remains, settlement patterns, and material culture." It might also be suggested that ethnohistoric sources that are evaluated as accurate or credible should be included in this list of complementary sources. The resulting data can be used to confirm or reject hypotheses about the relative proportions of food components in the Huron diet, and is particularly useful for tracing changes through time.

Ethnographic research conducted by Waugh (1916) in the early twentieth century may also be examined for consistencies with Champlain's and Sagard's accounts. His intent was to document the diet and methods of food preparation among several Iroquois societies in New York State, Quebec and Ontario. Waugh (1916) combined his own observations with a fairly thorough examination of ethnohistoric records, including those by Champlain, Sagard and the Jesuits, plus archaeo-

logical data. Waugh (1916:5) noticed that the relative importance of the "corn culture" was not equal among all tribes in the area in the seventeenth as well as in the twentieth century. Close similarities are apparent among the thirty different maize recipes described by Waugh (1916:80-103) and the few mentioned by Champlain and Sagard. For instance, Waugh (1916:79) also mentioned that the majority of foods in the Iroquoian diet were liquid in form and served as both food and beverage. Mention is made of ingredients and methods that no longer conformed to the pre-contact ways, such as boiling the mixtures in kettles as opposed to ceramic pots, or the inclusion of granulated sugar, butter and/or salt to several dishes (Waugh 1916:84). A few previously known foods had since become obsolete including the 'stinking corn' recipe so disliked by both Champlain and Sagard (Waugh 1916:101). Waugh, who learned of this method of preparation from the early ethnohistoric records, found that none of his twentieth century Iroquois informants knew of this dish. Some changes in methods of preparation and ingredients came about due to the exchange of ideas and objects between the Natives and the Europeans. It is interesting to note these changes as well as the similarities that have persisted through the course of the past three hundred years.

In conclusion, the need for thorough evaluations regarding the credibility and accuracy of the early post-contact ethnohistoric documents should be quite clear. Countless reasons for bias, both conscious and unconscious, affected the events that were directly observed by men like Sagard and Champlain, the informants they chose, the sorts of questions they would have asked, and the level of detail and accuracy of the information that they ultimately recorded. While Champlain visited the Huron as part of a larger and longer exploration of the country, Sagard lived among them briefly, with a particular and personal calling. These men had different interests and, consequently, produced different accounts of the Huron people. Regarding dietary practices, Sagard was the more thorough of the two, although he had the advantage of prior exposure to the sort of account that he intended to produce. The information recorded by Samuel de Champlain and Gabriel Sagard pertaining to the food and methods of preparation employed by the Huron is invaluable. As a result of their efforts, a considerable amount of information is available with which to compare complementary data sources as provided by the archaeological record, developing chemical analyses which study the remains of the people themselves, as well as more recent ethnographic analogy.

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