

Membertou's Gourd

The gourd dates to 1610 and represents the only recorded object directly linked to Membertou at Port Royal.

Overview:

In the spring of 1605 Pierre Dugua, sieur de Mons, Samuel de Champlain, Jean de Biencourt, sieur de Poutrincourt and others, established a colony at Port Royal in Acadia. Struck by the beauty of the surroundings and the potential for settlement, the group constructed a habitation. The Mi'kmaq were welcoming and provided much assistance.

When the Port Royal settlers were called back to France in 1607, they left the Habitation under the care of Membertou. In 1610, King Henri IV allowed Poutrincourt to continue his colonizing endeavours in Acadia. A condition was that he take some Jesuit missionaries to preach the gospel to the Indians.

Not desiring the presence of Jesuits, Poutrincourt, sailed from Dieppe on February 25, 1610, taking with him only one priest, Abbé Jessé Fléché. Upon their arrival at Port Royal, Poutrincourt and his

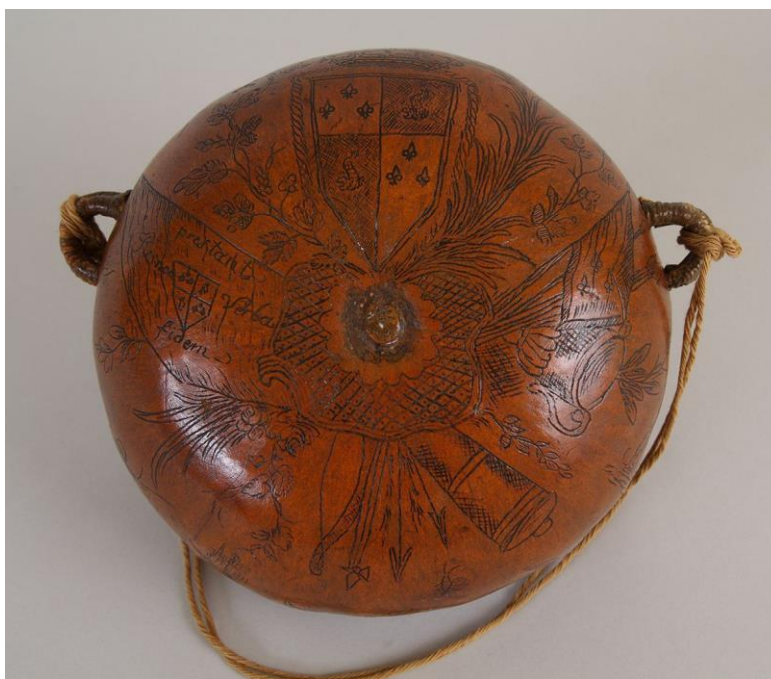
party found the Habitation in the same condition in which they left it.

Since Abbé Fléché did not know the Mi'kmaq language, Charles de Biencourt, at his father's request, undertook to teach the catechism to the Mi'kmaq. A short time later, on June 24, 1610,

Fléché administered baptism to Membertou and 20 members of his family.

After Membertou was baptised, he gifted a gourd (used as a water bottle) to his godfather, Charles Robin, Vicomte de Coulgne. Charles Robin had been a member of the Poutrincourt-Champlain expedition in 1604. The gift was taken back to Dieppe, where it was carved with the family coat of arms, family exploits,

and decorative motifs. The French court was notified of the successful conversions.



Front - Credit - Musée Stewart, l'Île Sainte-Hélène, Quebec

Description of The Gourd:

The gourd is round, shiny, and brownish-red in color. It has a handle on each side, which allows the gourd to be suspended around the neck for easy carrying. The entire circumference of the gourd is covered with relief work carvings that are quite delicate. This type of carving was popular in France during the Baroque era (1600-mid 18th century).

Carvings:

The gourd carvings are divided into three main groups. The first group features regal emblems such as a coat of arms, and an escutcheon (shield). The coat of arms is thought to be the crest of the Robin family. A Latin phrase is also carved in association with a small shield. It reads “Prestant res non verba fidem” and translates to deeds rather than words. The second group of carvings features different types of vegetation, animals and insects. They are found all around the gourd. The third group of carvings features objects such as flags, Mi’kmaq tools, a drum, ornate

container, small house, spears and cannons. (See Figures 1 and 2).



Back - Credit - Musée Stewart, l'Île Sainte-Hélène, Quebec

Relevance:

Membertou’s Gourd was elaborately carved and remained in the Robin family for generations. It commemorates a time of French exploration in Mi’kma’ki. More importantly, it symbolizes an alliance between the Mi’kmaq, Grand Chief Membertou, the French, and the Robin family of Dieppe who supported the early expeditions to Acadia.

Note:

Membertou’s Gourd was acquired several decades ago from the family of Comte de la Tour Fondue. The Countess de la Tour Fondue was the daughter and only heir of the Comte Robin de Coulonge, a descendent of Charles Robin Vicomte de Coulogne, who was in Acadia in 1604 and 1610.

With the support of Sipekne'katik District Grand Council, Membertou's Gourd will be on exhibit at the Museum of Natural History, 1747 Summer Street in Halifax, from June 21, National Aboriginal Day, to October 2017.



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