

## NEWS



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# Historic document lost

## U.S. buyer snags 1622 contract for 'Canada's Mayflower'

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A rare piece of Canadian history was lost to the country yesterday after an auction in New York, where an elaborately hand-written, 385-year-old legal document - described as the contract for "Canada's *Mayflower*" - was sold for \$90,000 by a Canadian collector to an American antiques dealer, who then flipped the relic to a second private buyer in the U.S.

The lambskin artifact, which outlines a 1622 agreement to send "the good shipp called the *Planter*" to the newly created colony of Nova Scotia, was accompanied by a letter from King James I authorizing payments to the Scottish nobleman who founded the first English-speaking settlement in mainland Canada.

"I specialize in documents that changed the world," said Seth Kaller, a New York dealer in historical treasures who purchased the contract from the unidentified Canadian collector at Sotheby's sale of rare books and manuscripts.

In 1621 - just a year after the *Mayflower* itself landed at Plymouth colony in Massachusetts - Scottish poet Sir William Alexander was granted settlement rights to much of eastern North America, including present-day Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, eastern Quebec and northern Maine.

The 1621 royal charter proclaiming Alexander's Canadian colony is the showcase artifact at Fort Anne National Historic Site in Annapolis Royal.

Alexander's dream had been to establish a "New Scotland" - or "Nova Scotia" in Latin - for Scottish-born settlers. The aim was to rival the fledgling French and English colonies of New France, New England, Newfoundland and Virginia.

On April 9, 1622, Alexander signed a contract with ship owner Thomas Hopkins that was described by Sotheby's as "one of the most significant documents relating to the early history of Canada to have been discovered in the 20th century."

Hopkins' ship, the *Planter*, was anchored at the same port as the *Mayflower* at the mouth of the Thames and was "clearly envisioned as the Scottish equivalent of the *Mayflower*," Sotheby's had noted prior to the sale.

Sotheby's manuscripts specialist Selby Kiffer told CanWest News Service prior to the sale that the contract had been held by Hopkins' descendants for centuries before it finally appeared for sale in London in 1989.

What's known about the *Planter's* voyage comes from Alexander's 1624 pamphlet *An Encouragement to Colonies*, which also published a famous early map of Canada featuring the words "New Scotlande."

The ship encountered storms off Cape Breton and dropped its passengers in St. John's before returning to Britain.

Alexander's Scottish colony came briefly to life under the direction of his son, who headed a settlement for four years at present-day Annapolis Royal, until a French-English peace treaty ceded the territory to New France in 1632.

Alexander, who died in 1640, was financially ruined by the venture. But he is remembered for inspiring other colonization projects and Nova Scotia did - generations after his death - become the principal destination in Canada for Scottish emigrants.

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