
NORTH AMERICA

*The Historical Geography of
a Changing Continent*

EDITED BY

ROBERT D. MITCHELL & PAUL A. GROVES

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD

PUBLISHERS



Figure 3.15 The Plaza-facing Palace of the Governors, Santa Fe, New Mexico, about 1885
(Courtesy Denver Public Library, Western History Department)

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- Annals*, Association of American Geographers (Nostrand, 1970, 1975, 1980; Meinig, 1972; Carlson, 1975).

France in North America

COLE HARRIS

University of British Columbia

The French penetration of North America began about 1500 and eventually influenced more than half the continent before France lost all her mainland North American territory following the Seven Years' War (1757-63). During this long period France made no spectacular North American conquests, developed a low regard for the potential of newly discovered mid-latitude lands, and sent very few colonists. Overall, North America was a marginal interest, never a preoccupation, and as a result France's long-term impact on the continent was far less than Spain's or England's. Yet France left her broad mark on North America, politically in a country, Canada, which eventually and ironically would grow out of French beginnings, and culturally in the continuing presence of French as a North American language. More than this, the French effort in North America established a northern pattern of European outreach to the New World that would endure long after New France fell. In the first instance, this pattern revolved around staple trades, which, during the French period, were in fish and furs. Although one of these activities was confined to the Atlantic coast while the other drew traders far into the interior, both detached capital and labor from France, placed them in the North American wilderness, and tied them back to France by tight lines of trade. Eventually towns developed at crucial break-of-bulk points and, because France and Britain warred in North America as well as in Europe, these towns became important garrisons, foci not only of trade but also of the military struggle for the continent. Apart from staple trades and towns, and somewhat detached from them, some immigrants turned to farming, usually introducing crops and agricultural techniques from northern France to settings where land was available and markets were poor. Staple trades, towns, and patchy, semisubsistent rural settlements were the ingredients of which the pattern of the French penetration of North America, and of the northern economy, was composed.

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

During the latter half of the 15th century, an international fishery, pursued by English, French, Basque, and Portuguese fishermen, operated in the open Atlantic south of Iceland. When John Cabot made known New World fishing grounds, part of this fishery quickly reached out to exploit them, transferring a well-established European economy across the North Atlantic. Breton, Norman, and Portuguese fishermen were in waters around Newfoundland by 1502, perhaps earlier, and French and Spanish Basques were there a few years later. Before the end of the century dozens of ports from southern England to southern Portugal regularly sent fishing ships, each carrying an average of 25 men, to transatlantic fisheries. Of these ports some 60 were French. Usually the voyages were financed in the ports of embarkation, although some merchants in the principal ports or in interior towns owned shares in many ships based in different harbors. Labor was recruited locally. Until recently the only figure we have had for the number of ships involved each year in the French transatlantic fishery was the estimate in 1577 of an English captain, Anthony Parkhurst, that there were 150 French ships in inshore waters around Newfoundland, and perhaps 3,000-4,000 men. This figure is probably low. Recent work with the notarial records in Bordeaux, La Rochelle, and Rouen has established the number of vessels outfitted in these ports for Newfoundland in particular years: 47 from Bordeaux in 1585, 49 from La Rochelle in 1559, 94 from Rouen in 1555. In most years of the 16th century many more ships and men were sent annually from Europe to Newfoundland than to the Caribbean and Central America.

The attraction was one of the world's greatest fishing grounds in shallow waters along the Atlantic coast of North America from southern Labrador to northern New England. There the Labrador Current and Gulf Stream mix, bringing the nutrients that nourish plankton and,

ultimately, the bottom-feeding cod. Cod could be caught in great numbers in relatively shallow water close to shore and on offshore banks at depths of 50-100 fathoms. Inshore waters were fished first, and the techniques that would dominate the inshore fishery for at least 200 years soon were well established. The ships that crossed the Atlantic were beached or anchored in New World harbors, where covered wharves were built (or repaired from the previous season) and boats assembled from parts prefabricated in the home port in Europe. Fishing took place from these boats operated close to shore by crews of three who fished with hempen lines and baited hooks. At the end of the day the fish were unloaded at the wharf, where they were headed, split, salted, piled for a few days, washed, and finally dried on beach cobbles, on branches cut and spread out for the purpose (*rances*), or on low drying platforms (*vignaux* or, in English, flakes). Drying required about ten good days, in each of which the cod had to be spread out, turned, turned again if rain threatened, and repiled at dusk. It was labor-intensive work. Shallop-master, header, splitter, and salter required specialized skills, and the shore master had to balance the size of the catch, weather, shore crew, and departure date to produce as much well-cured dried cod as possible for quality-sensitive markets. But much of the labor was unskilled; peasants from overpopulated countrysides, even boys of eight or ten years entered the fishery, providing cheap labor ashore, and extended some of the regional accents and techniques of a still intensely local France across the Atlantic each season. At the end of the fishing season, shore installations were secured as much as possible against weather, natives, and other fishermen, and the dried cod loaded aboard ship. Ship and crew returned to France.

The offshore fishery on the banks developed in the second half of the 16th century and was conducted by ships equipped to fish without landing in the New World. On the banks, perhaps 200 miles from Newfoundland, men stood in barrels on the deck and fished with long baited and weighted lines. The cod they laboriously hauled aboard were headed, split, and stored in the hold between layers of salt. This wet or green cod, much more perishable than the dry-cured variety, was marketed in northern France, principally along the Seine and Loire rivers.

The banks fishery was French and did not require a New World base; the inshore fishery by contrast, was international and dependent on New World harbors. Until about 1575 the French inshore fishery focused on southeastern Newfoundland, the strait between Newfoundland and Labrador, and eastern Cape Breton Island. In all these locations it competed with Portuguese and Spanish Basque fishermen. On the Labrador shore, Basque whalers came in large ships (up to 600 tons) with large crews (up to 120 men) and built shore installations for rendering blubber that were even more labor-intensive than the work camps of the cod fishery. Only after 1570, as the Danes reasserted control of the Icelandic fishery, did English fishermen cross the Atlantic in numbers; soon English raiding and piracy displaced other fishermen from southeastern Newfoundland. As this happened the French fishery became more dispersed, considerably penetrating the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The banks fishery made no regular use of the New World coast, and the inshore fishery, which did, relied on European labor. Yet the inshore fishery drew Europeans and natives into contact, and trade in furs began early in the 16th century. There is no evidence that the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland engaged in this trade; rather, furs probably came from the Micmac Indians in what is now Nova Scotia and northeastern New Brunswick, the Montagnais along the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and Iroquoian people along the St. Lawrence River, who probably canoed well into the Gulf to obtain European goods. At first Indians traded with fishermen, but as early as the 1550s small fur-trading companies detached themselves from the fishery and penetrated the Gulf of St. Lawrence. From 1580 French fur traders ventured each summer to Tadoussac at the mouth of the Saguenay River. Like the fishermen they returned home each fall.

During the first century of French activity along the northeastern edge of North America, there was one major attempt to colonize, inspired by Spanish discoveries far to the south. In 1534, Francis I, king of France, authorized Jacques Cartier, a captain from St. Malo, to explore west from the strait between Labrador and Newfoundland, hoping he would "discover certain islands and lands where it is said a great quantity of gold, and other precious

things, are to be found." The French court dreamed of another Aztec or Inca empire for the plucking. Instead Cartier found a shore (the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence) "composed of stone and horrible rugged rocks"; he thought the south shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence was incomparably better, "the finest land one can see, and full of beautiful trees and meadows." He touched on Anticosti Island but missed the entrance to the St. Lawrence River (Fig. 4.1). The next year he was back with more ships and men and, directed by two Indians he had captured the previous year, sailed up the St. Lawrence River as far as the agricultural

villages of St. Lawrence Iroquoians near Québec. Cartier and a few of his men went on to Hochelaga, a palisaded village on Montreal island composed, Cartier said, of some fifty houses each some 50 paces long and 12 to 15 paces wide. He returned to spend the winter near Québec, where twenty-five of his crew died of scurvy before Cartier learned of a cure from the Indians: a decoction rich in vitamin C made from the ground needles and bark of cedar branches. As he left Cartier captured several Indians and got away to France.

Like the Indians who enticed Coronado and de Soto into the American West and South with

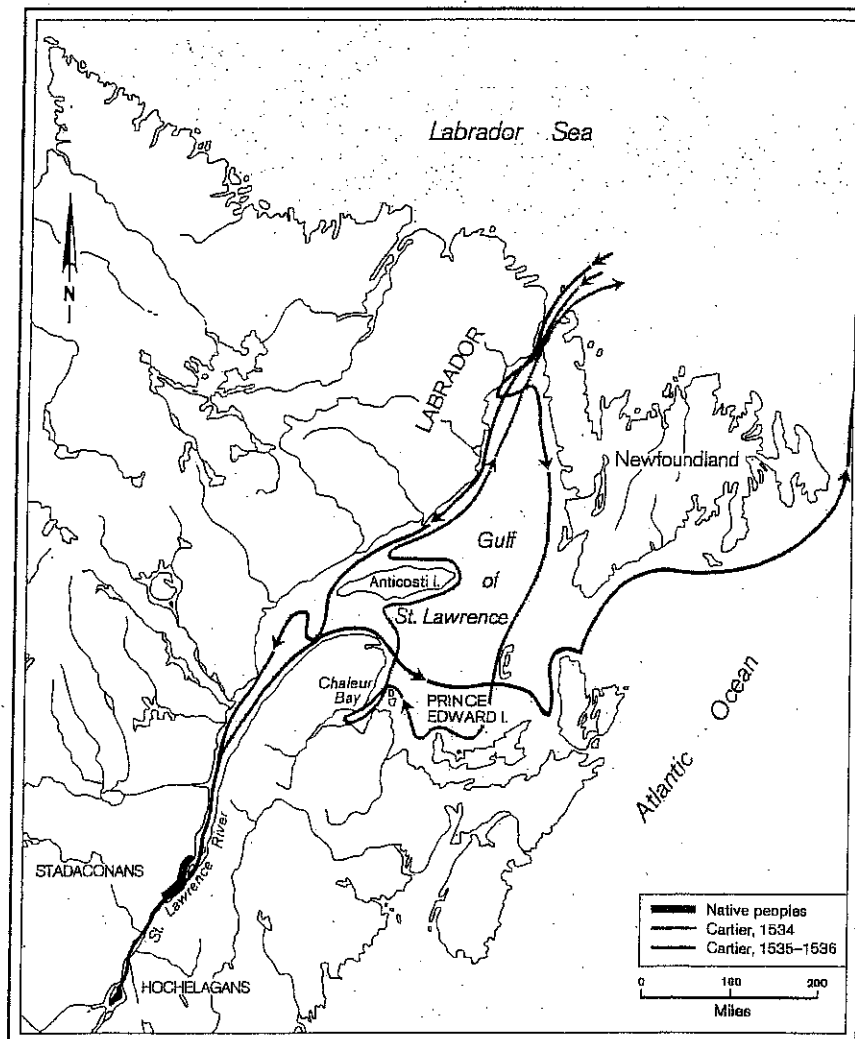


Figure 4.1 Explorations of Jacques Cartier, 1534-1536

tales of gold, Cartier's captives told the French what they wanted to hear. In the kingdom of Saguenay, not far beyond Canada, there were gold and silver, and people (at times with wings and without anuses) who wore woollens like people in France. Although such stories did not get the Indians home—all Cartier's captives, save one girl, were dead by 1539—Cartier set out again in 1541, this time with five ships, several hundred men and women, and livestock. He was to found a colony. The details of Cartier's second winter in North America, spent just above Québec, are less clear than the first, but there was scurvy and there were repeated Indian attacks (Cartier's Indian policy was reaping its reward). In 1542 he packed up and left. His superior in the colonization venture (Jean-François de la Rocque, sieur de Roberval), came out with more colonists; but with a motley collection of aristocrats and criminals, French-Indian relations already soured, and winter ahead, Roberval's prospect was hopeless. His colony lasted less than a year.

In their own terms the Cartier-Roberval voyages were failures. The kingdom of Saguenay had not been found; the gold and diamonds Cartier brought back to France were iron pyrites and mica. Plantation crops could not be grown. There was no obvious route to Asia. The winter was daunting. For more than 60 years the negative results of these voyages discouraged the French from another attempt to colonize northeastern North America, but Cartier and Roberval had expanded enormously the geographical knowledge of the gulf and valley of the St. Lawrence—which henceforth appeared in considerable detail on European maps of North America—and they had established a powerful French claim to a major North American entrant. Basically, they demonstrated the irrelevance in northern middle latitudes of a Spanish model of New World colonization, and left the French where they had been in North America, that is, with an established cod fishery and an incipient fur trade.

FRANCE IN NORTH AMERICA IN 1600

In 1600 the numerous French settlements along the northeast coast of the continent (Fig. 4.2) were all seasonal work camps for a migratory,

male labor force drawn from the Atlantic coast of France. There were no women. No society surrounded the fishery—the few Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland did not frequent the fishing camps, at least not when the French were there. Life ashore was an extension of life aboard ship. The ships brought workers to a strange shore, perched them there for a time to accomplish a job, then withdrew them—vehicles of a transatlantic spatial economy that connected European capital, labor, and technique to New World resources. Because there was no alternative New World employment to bid up the value of their labor, fishermen bound for the New World received little more than other French fishermen. Because France was still an intensely regional country, and shipowners recruited men from local hinterlands, there was much variety of local French ways within the common overall pattern of the fishery. Because no one intended to stay and because the leavings from one season could not be counted on to survive to the next, shore installations were quickly, minimally constructed. Behind the more frequented harbors the forest was cut a mile or two inland, while ramshackle wharves, drying platforms, and cabins lined the waterfront.

Perhaps a quarter of the French ships went to the banks and returned directly to France, usually to ports at the mouth of the Seine or the Loire rivers. A large part of the wet (green) cod they carried was destined for the Paris market. The English, who by 1600 were well established in southeastern Newfoundland, deflected the French inshore fishery to the north and southwest. Most ships from western Normandy and northern Brittany (the Gulf of St. Malo) headed for the northern peninsula of Newfoundland and the south coast of Labrador. French Basque shore installations were scattered along the south coast of Newfoundland, on northeastern Cape Breton Island, and on the Gaspé peninsula in the western Gulf of St. Lawrence. By 1600 Spanish Basque and Portuguese competition was weakening as men and ships were commandeered for Spanish military ventures (including the Spanish armada of 1588), and as inflation (initiated by New World bullion) increased costs for Iberian fishermen. Much of the southern European market for dried cod was filled, in 1600, by French and English merchants.

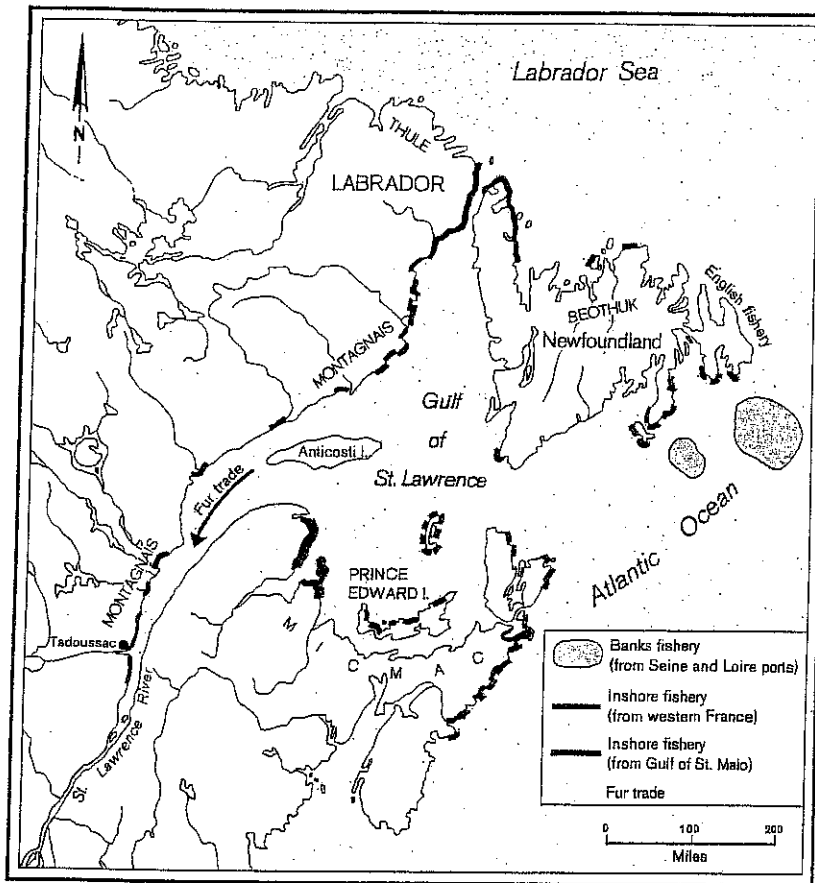


Figure 4.2 France in North America, 1600

At the same time the fur trade was well established in the western Gulf of St. Lawrence. It relied on native labor, drew native and European traders into direct annual contact, and quickly channeled European goods into native economies in payment for furs. The points of annual contact between the westward outreach of European trade goods and the reciprocal flow of native furs were familiar to European and Indian traders. In 1600 a Huguenot, Chauvin de Tonnetuit, armed with a charter from the king, tried to establish a permanent trading post and year-round settlement at Tadoussac. The attempt failed, but a similar effort would be successful slightly farther west a few years later. Whereas the fishery spread a thin, discontinuous rim of French influence along the rocky shores of northeastern North America, the fur trade drew French

people and influence inland, up the St. Lawrence.

A century of European contact probably spread European diseases among the Indians of what is now Atlantic Canada. Early in the 17th century a Jesuit missionary reported that the Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick

are astonished and often complain that since the French mingle with and carry on trade with them, they are dying fast, and the population is thinning out. They assert that before this association and intercourse all their countries were very populous, and they tell how one by one the different coasts according as they have begun to traffic with us have been more reduced by disease.

Along the St. Lawrence River the agricultural Iroquoians whom Cartier encountered in the 1530s were gone in 1600. Perhaps European

diseases killed them, but it is more generally assumed that the St. Lawrence Iroquoians were defeated and dispersed about 1580 either by Huron Indians from southern Ontario or by Iroquois from upper New York State. The St. Lawrence Iroquoians may have blocked the westward flow of European goods, thereby upsetting the balance of native power and precipitating the attacks that proved fatal. As the French fur trade spread up the St. Lawrence after 1600, an unoccupied valley—an extraordinary change since Cartier's day—lay before it.

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Chauvin de Tonnetuit's colony at Tadoussac had failed, but in 1604 another Huguenot trader, Pierre de Gua, sieur de Monts, also obtained a monopoly charter for fur trading, and embarked with colonists. He went to the Bay of Fundy, establishing a first settlement on the St. Croix River, the present border between Maine and New Brunswick, and moved the next year to a more favorable location across the Bay of Fundy at Port Royal. By 1607 when de Monts's monopoly was terminated and he and most of his colonists returned to France, the feasibility of French settlement in the New World had been demonstrated. The next year de Monts's lieutenant, Samuel de Champlain, armed with a one-year trading monopoly, intent upon exploration, and aware that the Bay of Fundy was a cul-de-sac, went to the St. Lawrence River where he selected a strong defensive site at Québec, the head of navigation for large sailing ships, and built a post almost 1,000 miles from the open North Atlantic. The French were now on the St. Lawrence to stay; eventually Champlain's post would become the principal town in New France.

Although Champlain had established a tiny outpost in a depopulated valley, Indians were not far away (Fig. 4.3). Almost immediately Champlain was involved with them. To the immediate north and west were Algonquian-speakers who lived primarily by fishing and hunting: the Montagnais in the Saguenay valley, the Algonquin in the Ottawa valley, and the Nipissing northeast of Georgian Bay. Around the eastern Great Lakes were Iroquoian-speakers, agricultural people who raised corn, beans, squashes, and tobacco, and

who lived in large villages similar to Hochelaga. Of the Iroquoians there were several groups: Huron south of Georgian Bay, Petun just west of the Huron, Neutral around the western end of Lake Ontario, Erie at the southeastern corner of Lake Erie, and Iroquois south of Lake Ontario in what is now upstate New York. The Algonquian-speakers lived in small, well-dispersed bands, but the agricultural Iroquoians were numerous and concentrated, with as many as 3,000 people in a single village. When Champlain arrived at Québec there may have been 20,000 Huron, as many Neutral, and almost as many Iroquois in upstate New York. The St. Lawrence valley was a no-man's-land between the Iroquois to the south and southwest and the Montagnais, Algonquins, and Huron, in alliance, to the north and northwest.

Interested as he was in exploration and trade, Champlain had no choice but to plunge into this Indian world and to take sides in Indian conflicts. In 1609 he sent a young man (Etienne Brulé) to live with the Huron; when Champlain saw him near Montreal the next year he was wearing Indian clothing and speaking Huron. In 1609 and again in 1615 Champlain and his new Indian allies launched campaigns into Iroquois territory, the second an ignominious failure to capture a well-fortified village south of Lake Ontario. Champlain was wounded and carried in a wicker basket much of the way back to Huronia where, more than 500 miles west of Québec, he spent the winter of 1615-16. The French were becoming familiar with Indian ways, had learned to use and repair birchbark canoes, and were acquiring a geographical knowledge of much of the Great Lakes basin. Champlain's last and most remarkable map, drawn in 1632, shows Lake Ontario, Lake Huron, and parts of Lake Superior with considerable accuracy, the largest addition to the European cartography of North America since Cartier. More telling in the long run, Champlain had committed the French to the Algonquins and the Huron—to trade with them, to warfare with their enemies and, for the purpose of trade and movement, to learning their languages and adopting many of their ways.

Yet in the first half of the 17th century, the French fur trade was confined to the St. Lawrence valley. Indians brought furs there, first to

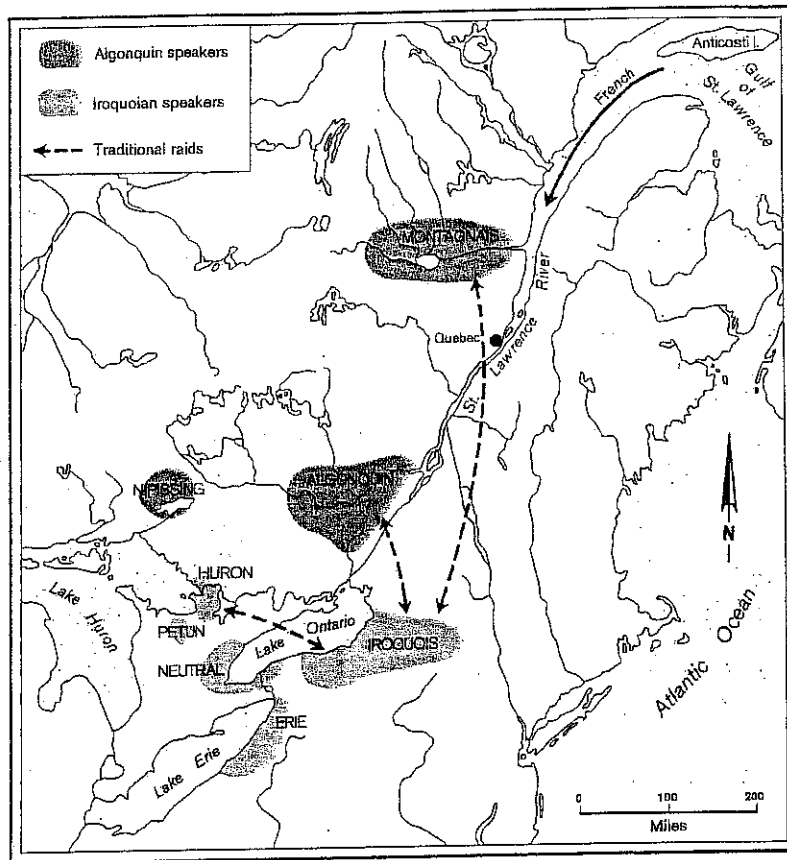


Figure 4.3 Indians Around the St. Lawrence in the Early 17th Century

Québec and later to Trois-Rivières or to Montreal. Initially the Algonquin controlled the trade, preventing French traders from ascending the Ottawa River and exacting tolls from the Huron and Nipissing who traveled to the St. Lawrence. Later, when Iroquois raids had weakened the Algonquin, the Huron and Nipissing came toll-free to Montreal. Jealous of their position as middle men in the trade, they would not let French traders into the interior; Recollet and Jesuit missionaries were admitted to Huronia on condition that they did not trade. During these years Québec, Trois-Rivières, and Montreal were outposts of French trade on the edge of an Indian world, and only the last stage of the fur trade was in French hands.

Although French traders were excluded from the interior, the Indians of the Great Lakes basin faced immense new pressures. The Huron, Algonquins, and Montagnais were allied

with the French along the St. Lawrence, the Iroquois were allied with the Dutch at the mouth of the Hudson River, and the two alliances competed with increasing violence. The demand for European goods and the diffusion of firearms (which the Dutch traded freely with their Indian allies and the French withheld from theirs) intensified traditional animosities while disrupting balances of power. In 1634 European diseases, probably carried by Jesuit missionaries, reached the Great Lakes basin and killed approximately half its peoples. By 1639 there were only 12,000 Huron and Petun. Children and old people had been particularly vulnerable; most of the old men, the respected leaders of Indian society, were dead. At the same time villages with missionaries were divided between Christian and pagan factions. Economically, demographically, culturally, and militarily the pre-contact Indian world of the Great Lakes basin was under intense assault,

the region in ferment. Nor was the French hold on the St. Lawrence secure. In 1628 an English merchant-adventurer intercepted a shipload of settlers and supplies bound for Québec and captured the post the next year. The French did not recover Québec until 1633.

Eventually, the French-Huron trading system collapsed like a house of cards. Iroquois looting raids against populations weakened by disease and dissension turned to all-out warfare. At first the Iroquois blocked the Ottawa River, allowing only four Huron trading parties to reach Montreal between 1639 and 1648. Then they turned to the population centers. In a series of well-organized campaigns, Iroquois warriors destroyed the Huron villages between 1647 and 1649, the Petun in 1649 in 1650, the Nipissing between 1649 and 1651, and the Neutral in 1651 and 1652. Refugees from these groups and others, fearing the same fate, fled west and north, many of them to settle west of Lake Michigan. Except for the Iroquois south of Lake Ontario and the Shawnee at the forks of the Ohio (dispersed by the Iroquois in 1669 and 1670), the entire eastern Great Lakes basin south to the Ohio valley was depopulated. The scholarly Jesuits, some of whom had lived in Huronia for years, burned their missions, thanked God that so many of the dead had been baptised, and were not again in the territory northwest of Lake Ontario until 1660.

After this horrendous depopulation of the Great Lakes basin, French traders began to venture beyond Montreal to reach Indian groups west of Lake Michigan. Such trade was illegal—the Crown hoped to encourage Indians to return to Montreal and keep French traders out of the interior—but almost impossible to control. After 1654 some Indian traders did make their way back to Montreal each year, but French-Indian trade increasingly took place farther west. By the 1660s there were some 200 French traders and canoemen (*coureurs de bois* they were called) in the west each year. When the Crown finally legalized the western trade in 1681, the number of *coureurs de bois* increased and native trading journeys to Montreal stopped.

The French fur trade moved inland along the rivers. It depended on the birchbark canoe, Indian guides, and traders who spoke Indian languages and observed Indian ceremonies. A handful of French traders penetrated a huge,

still-Indian territory, reaching out briefly to gather furs at what were soon prearranged trading places and to send them as quickly as possible to Montreal. Soon the lines of trade were hundreds of miles long, and the seasonal round trip from Montreal became impossible. Posts had to be established in the interior and men left to overwinter in them. Fort de la baie de Puants was established on Green Bay in 1670. By 1685 there were French posts on the Mississippi River (reached in 1673 and explored by La Salle to its mouth in 1682) and others north of Lake Superior (Fig. 4.4), all on land that the Indians considered theirs and that they allowed the French to use in return for annual presents. In this fashion several hundred *coureurs de bois* operated a network of posts extending halfway across the continent, and dominated the trade of the Great Lakes basin. Situated between lakes Huron and Michigan, Michilimackinac became a major entrepôt, receiving furs from the interior and supplies and trade goods from Montreal. There were Jesuit missions at five of the western posts, but after the earlier disasters most of the Jesuits served converted Indians and white traders and did not proselytize vigorously.

The fur trade established the French on the Bay of Fundy (the heart of the territory called Acadia) and along the lower St. Lawrence (the entrance to the territory called Canada). In both locations the mixed, crop-livestock farming of northwestern Europe was feasible. Merchants bent on the fur trade were little interested in agriculture, which involved the great expense of colonization; but the Crown judged that settlers would strengthen the French position in North America and, eventually, provide a market for French manufactures. Hence the stipulation in trading charters that merchant companies bring settlers. Halfheartedly, a few companies did. In this way agricultural settlement began, a somewhat inadvertent by-product of the fur trade.

It is not clear whether de Monts left settlers in Acadia in 1607, but merchants who held trading monopolies in the region after him certainly did. By 1654 there were perhaps 30 families near Port Royal. The Acadian population would grow from this tiny base, to which over the years a few men but virtually no women would be added from outside. In Canada the Crown created a large trading com-

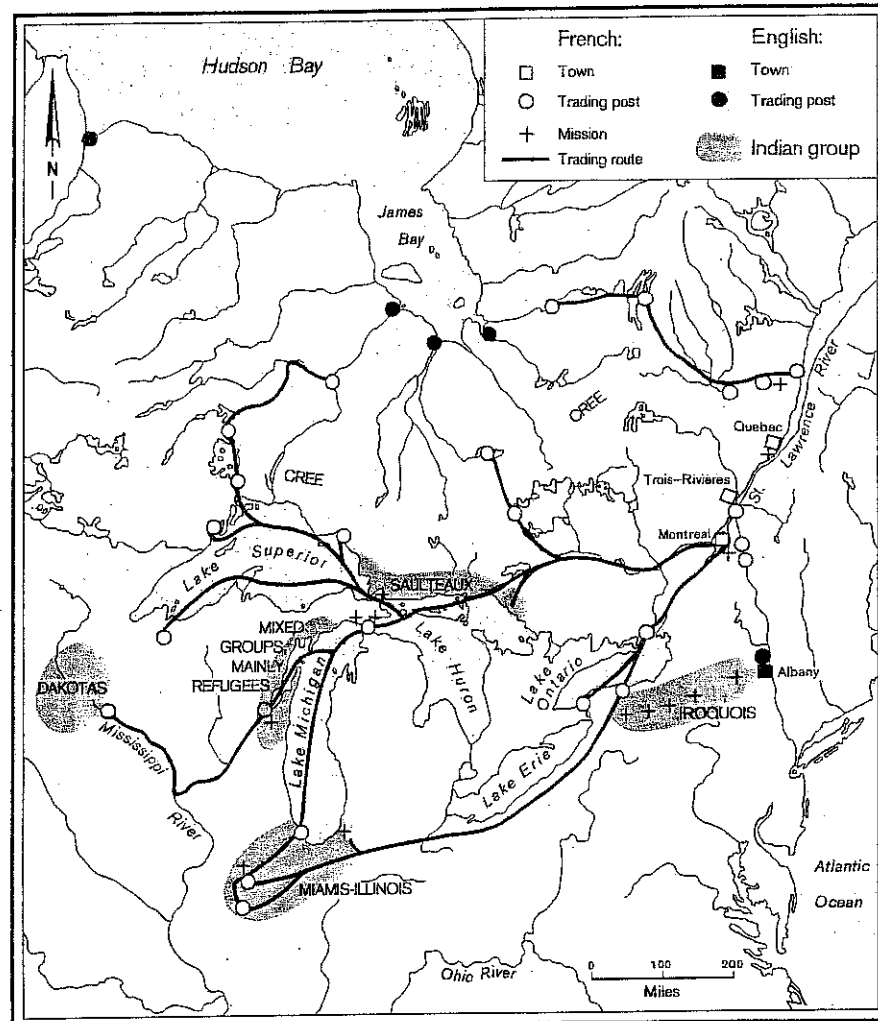


Figure 4.4 The Expanding French Fur Trade, 1679-1685

pany, the Company of New France, in 1627, gave it land title and a monopoly of trade, and required it to establish 4,000 colonists in the next fifteen years. This the company could not do (its first contingent was captured by the English in 1628), but over the years it sent some settlers and granted many seigneuries along the St. Lawrence River in the hope that seigneurs would become colonizers. In 1663 when the Crown revoked the charter of the Company of New France and took over the administration of Canada, there were perhaps 2,500 people of French descent along the lower St. Lawrence. Over the next decade the Crown sent about 1,000 women, many of them from poor-

houses in Paris, and offered inducements to demobilized soldiers and indentured servants to stay in the colony. When royal interest in Canada waned after 1672, only two or three women and not many more men would emigrate from France each year, until the 1750s when some prisoners (salt smugglers) were sent out and soldiers were again induced to stay. In sum, this was a paltry migration of permanent settlers to Canada: over a century and a half only some 9,000 people, almost all young on arrival, most of them male, only about 250 couples married in France. The fur trade, of course, depended on Indian labor and required only a small resident white popula-

tion, while agriculture as it developed along the lower St. Lawrence offered little to attract investment or labor. The ordinary emigrant who took himself to Canada faced the challenge of pioneering in a forested, northern setting where, in the 17th century, Indians threatened and there was not much market for agricultural products. In these circumstances very few French people chose to emigrate, and the Company of New France, seigneurs, and the Crown were all indifferent colonizers.

Agriculture in Acadia depended on tidal marshland around the Bay of Fundy (Fig. 4.5). The Acadians dyked these marshes, using sods reinforced by branches and logs to build broad

dykes some six feet high. At intervals along the dykes there were sluice gates (*aboiteaux*) with clapper valves that closed to the tide. Land so dyked would freshen in a few years and make excellent pasture or ploughland. Soil fertility could be maintained by occasional flooding. The marshes along the Dauphin River at Port Royal were the first to be dyked. By 1670 about 70 farm families lived there; by the 1680s the limited marshland at Port Royal was occupied and settlement spread to the larger marshes at the head of the Bay of Fundy. Behind their dykes the Acadians planted wheat and legumes (beans and peas), their principal field crops, and raised cattle, sheep, and swine. On

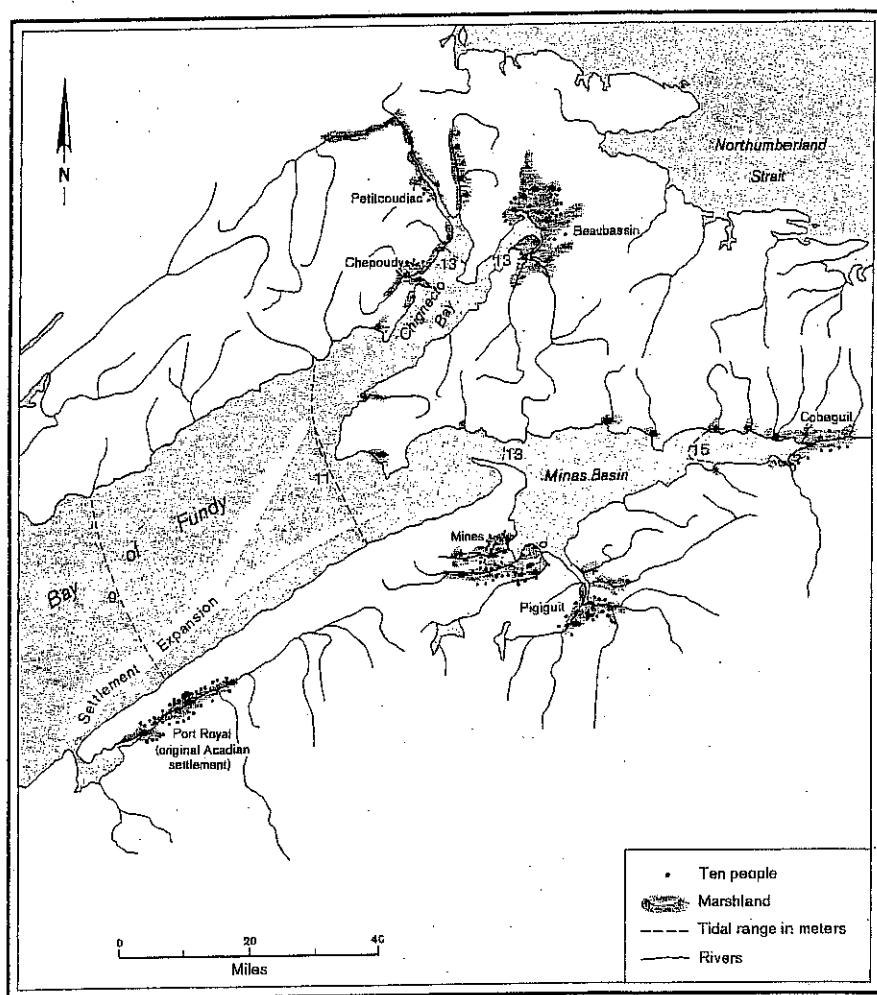


Figure 4.5 Acadian Marshlands

higher ground at the edge of the marshes they built small wooden houses, tended kitchen gardens and a few apple trees, and perhaps cleared a little upland. Supplemented by various gatherings from forest and sea, such farms provided most of the needs of the families who worked them, and a little surplus wheat and beef that entered a coasting trade to Boston. In 1686 there were two small stores in Port Royal, both operated by New Englanders.

After its small, founding migration the Acadian population grew almost entirely from natural increase and was soon demographically balanced. Compared with peasant France, the rate of population growth was high, a result of a lower average marriage age for women and of lower infant and child mortality rates, a reflection, presumably, of improved nutrition. By 1686 there were about 800 Acadians, almost all of them progeny of the founding families. The nuclear family was the primary unit of settlement, but adjacent farm families frequently had the same surname, and ties of consanguinity linked all the settlements around the Bay of Fundy. Acadian material culture, about which we know too little, must have reflected a selection of peasant ways from western France, supplemented by a few borrowings from the Micmac Indians and adapted to the particular environment of the marshlands. Compared with French peasants, the Acadians were relatively detached from economic power. The seigneurial system (the French counterpart of the manorial system in England) was introduced in a few early land grants, but there is no evidence that Acadian farmers ever paid seigneurial rents for land. There were no royal taxes, although when the French held Port Royal a governor and a few troops were usually there and a militia was raised locally. Commercial opportunity was limited because Acadia was a small catchment area for furs, there was no commercial fishing in the Bay of Fundy, and marshland farms produced crops and livestock that were available widely around the North Atlantic. In these circumstances Acadian society was not very stratified; people had enough to eat but there was no wealth. In 1686 the governor's small thatched house in Port Royal was only a little larger than the tiny Acadian houses nearby. Essentially, the marshlands provided a limited opportunity for the French

peasantry but not for many other elements of French society. They became home to a people whose way of life, French in most details, soon had no precise French counterpart.

In rural Canada farming slowly developed after France regained the colony in 1633. The first farms were near Québec on the north shore, and by the 1650s there were others near Trois-Rivières and Montreal—at this period and for some years thereafter only on the north shore because of the Iroquois threat. By 1692, date of an early Canadian census, some 10,000 people lived on farms along the lower St. Lawrence, most within 20 miles of Québec, another patch at Trois-Rivières, and a third on Montreal Island and along adjacent shores (Fig. 4.6). The unit of settlement was the family farm, developed on a lot of 75 to 90 acres held from a seigneur. Some of the earliest deeds of concession of these lots have survived, notarized documents defining the land and the terms by which it was held. From the beginning farm lots were long and narrow (Fig. 4.7), in any given area their long axes parallel to each other and roughly perpendicular to the river. This survey, which came to Canada from Normandy, had been common in areas of new colonization in medieval Europe and would have a long life in Canada. In the 1660s the Jesuits, and then the intendant Jean Talon, experimented with a radial survey intended to group settlement around village squares, but the long lot suited a riparian colony. It was easily surveyed, provided direct access to the river, the colony's highway, and enabled people to live on their own farms yet fairly close to neighbors.

From the beginning rural settlement was dispersed rather than nucleated. Farm families lived on their own land in houses 600 to 1,200 feet apart along the river and made their own agricultural decisions. The open-field village, still common in many areas from which emigrants had come to Canada, was not introduced. Peasants in France had been moving away from the collective constraints of open-field agriculture when they acquired the means to do so, and in Canada, where a riverfront lot was available for the asking somewhere along the lower St. Lawrence at any time during the 17th century, colonial farmers (*habitants*) did so from the beginning. To be sure, the forest was a

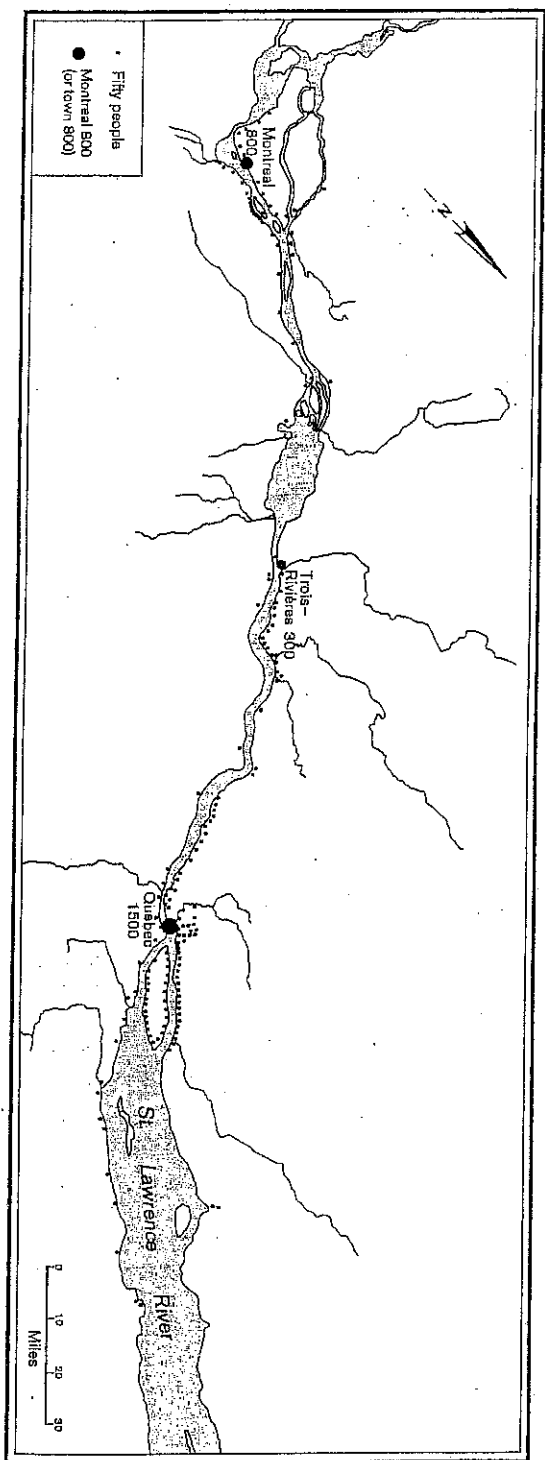


Figure 4.6 Distribution of Population in the St. Lawrence Valley, 1692

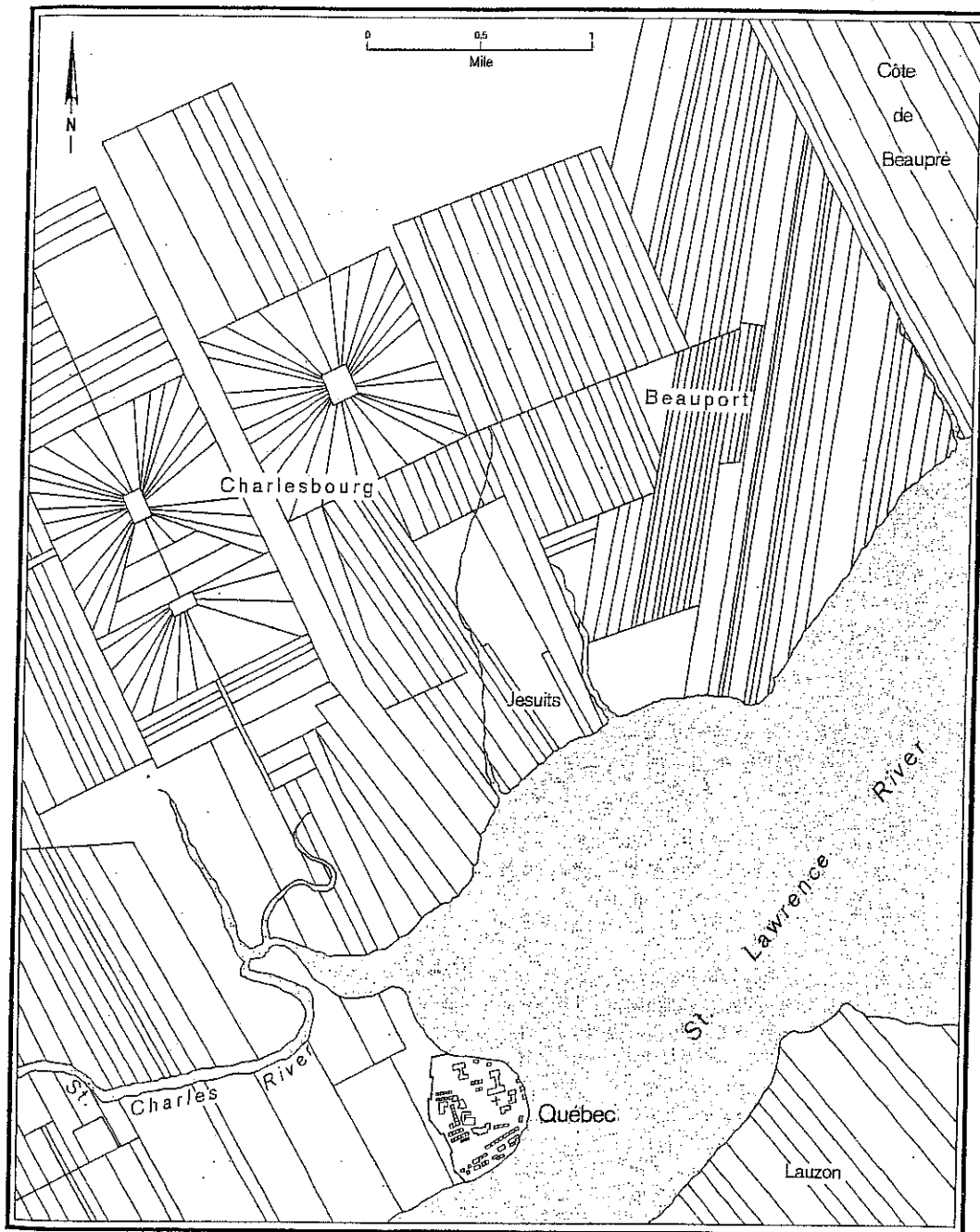


Figure 4.7 The Cadastral System along the St. Lawrence River (after Catalogne, 1709)

daunting barrier that made a farm virtually inaccessible to a destitute immigrant. Most men lived in Canada for some years as a soldier, indentured servant, or wage laborer before trying to farm. Many who eventually tried to clear the forest gave up or soon died. Still, the relative availability of land for farming raised the price of labor well above its French value. Slowly the forest yielded.

The Canadian farm, like the Acadian, was a mixed operation of, generally, the northwest European type. Fields were sown in a two-course rotation of wheat and fallow, occasionally in a three-course rotation with legumes and other grains (usually oats and barley) as well as fallow. The land was rarely manured, seed was poor, and after the initial high returns on newly cleared lands, yields were low—as they were on pioneer farms throughout early North America. With about 15 acres cleared the farm produced some 50 bushels of wheat, hardly enough after feeding a family, putting seed aside, and paying milling charges, land rents, and a tithe (1/26th of the grain harvest) to provide anything for the market. With 30 acres cleared the farm produced about 100 bushels of wheat and probably carried two or three cows, as many swine, a few sheep, and perhaps a pair of oxen. There was a kitchen garden with common French vegetables, herbs, tobacco, and usually a few fruit trees. Such a farm provided for most of the subsistence of a family, paid the seigneurial rent and milling charges and had a modest surplus—some bushels of wheat, perhaps a pig or a calf, perhaps some butter—for sale.

The market, however, was weak. The long, steep decline in the price of wheat and of other agricultural products along the lower St. Lawrence in the 17th century was interrupted only when harvests were bad and few farmers had much to sell. There were no agricultural exports: France or the French West Indies were too far away, and local markets in Québec and Montreal were small. Canadian agriculture developed within this severe constraint. Farms raising many of the crops and livestock of northwestern France could be created. Families could live on them, establishing some market connection, perhaps eventually live a little better than the poor French peasantry, but hardly prosper. The countryside of the lower St. Lawrence admitted people to a limited economic

opportunity that encouraged demographic rather than commercial expansion. In the early years girls married soon after puberty. Later, when the population was more balanced, they married, on average, at 19 or 20, still younger than their counterparts in France or in the English colonies. Families were large and life expectancy relatively long; the population would double in less than 30 years, and most of the increase would be absorbed by farms hewn from the forest.

In these circumstances the Canadian countryside, like the Acadian, was relatively undifferentiated economically or occupationally. Save millers and blacksmiths here and there, almost all heads of households were farmers. Farms of similar age were likely to be similarly developed. Before the end of the 17th century, in the areas of oldest settlement a few peasants worked as much as 50 cleared acres, a substantial farm in Canada, but nothing like the holdings of the wealthiest peasants in many French villages. To a considerable extent the countryside developed within its own momentum, detached from the external economic influences that bore so heavily on the peasantry in France. The farm family and local rural community produced a high percentage of the goods and services that they required. The line of farm houses, the *côte* as it was called, became a loose rural neighborhood frequently reinforced by ties of blood. The parish became a social unit of some importance, although without the responsibility, so onerous in France, to apportion royal taxes. To be sure, at either end of the colony there was employment in a staple trade, toward Montreal in the fur trade and downriver from Québec in the fishery. To enter these worlds was to become a seasonal laborer working for specified terms. A few seigneurs tried to develop large farms on their seigneurial domains; there would be a little wage labor or some form of share cropping. A few merchants were in the countryside in the fall to buy grain and sell cloth, salt, and some ceramic and metal ware. Many peasants were in debt to them. Seigneurs subgranted farmplots in return for annual rents and privileges, such as the monopoly of grist milling. In the early years they often neglected these charges and prerogatives because their sparsely settled seigneuries were unprofitable, but their legal rights were clear, and as the population rose more were exer-

cised. A few bushels of wheat a year could be a heavy charge for a subsistent farmer to pay. The religious orders that controlled some of the best land near Québec, Trois-Rivières, and Montreal were careful record-keepers, and before 1700 the large Sulpician seigneurie of Montreal Island was turning a profit; peasants prevaricated as they could in the payment of charges. Edicts and ordinances from the governor and intendant, representatives of royal power, were read and posted in front of parish churches and, in a colony frequently at war with the English and the Iroquois, men drilled in local militias. In sum, the apparatus of power was at hand in rural Canada, but the exercise was often muted by the availability of land and the weakness of the market.

Québec and Montreal, the towns of early Canada, were both much more dependent on their external connections than on the surrounding countryside. At the head of deep-sea navigation on the St. Lawrence, Québec was the colony's port. It received various imports from France (mostly manufactured goods and food stuffs) and sent furs. Montreal, the point of transshipment from small ships and riverboats to canoes, was founded as a mission in 1642 and quickly became the focus of the interior fur trade. Until 1681 some Indians came to trade almost every year, while the expeditions of *coureurs de bois* that began in the 1650s and continued for the rest of the century were outfitted in and eventually returned to Montreal. The Canadian merchants who soon operated in these towns bought French goods, hired labor, operated interior posts, and sent furs to La Rochelle; their warehouses lined the riverfront; and their commerce provided much of the vitality of these first French towns in North America. Québec and Montreal were also administrative and military centers. There were forts and troops in both; in 1688 Montreal was walled for protection against the Iroquois. As the colonial capital, Québec was the residence of governor and intendant and of a considerable bureaucracy. The religious orders erected their finest buildings and maintained most of their staffs in the towns.

In the late 1660s the intendant Jean Talon established a shipyard and brewery in Québec, a tannery nearby, and iron works near Trois-Rivières, and encouraged the preparation of masts and naval stores along the river below

Québec. But it was difficult to break the Canadian economy from its export dependence on furs and local dependence on farming. Most of Talon's initiatives collapsed when royal subsidies were removed, victims of the high cost and, often, inexperience of Canadian labor, the smallness of the local market, and the distance to external markets. Saw and grist mills serving local needs emerged in the countryside, and some small ships and boats were built at Québec.

The French migratory fishery all the while maintained a relatively static presence along the Atlantic coast. Techniques for catching and curing cod had changed little since the previous century, but the organization of the fishery did become more concentrated and, here and there, people began to overwinter. In France the fishery came to depend on a few ports: principally Havre-du-Grâce (mouth of the Seine) and Sable d'Olonne (south of the Loire) in the green fishery; and St. Malo, Granville, La Rochelle, and the Basque port of St.-Jean-de-Luz in the dry. Firms that specialized in the transatlantic fishery operated out of these ports, sending out ships that were considerably larger (on average perhaps 90 tons) than those of the 16th century. Their destination in the northwestern Atlantic was limited in the north by Thule Eskimos, who drove French fishermen off most of the Labrador coast and raided across the Strait to Newfoundland, and in the south by fishermen from New England, who increasingly controlled the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia. The English migratory fishery remained entrenched in southeastern Newfoundland. The French held the rest of Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Along these French shores the fishery focused increasingly on proven, reliable harbors: Percée and Gaspé in the western gulf, Plaisance in southern Newfoundland, and a number of harbors along the bleak, ice-bound coast of northeastern Newfoundland, a region judged to be uninhabitable.

Elsewhere fishing ships began to leave behind caretakers to look after shore installations over the winter. Eventually, a few merchants began to stay as well. Such men (called *habitants-pêcheurs* by the French and planters by the English) controlled at least one fishing property and a few boats, hired migrant labor, and purchased supplies from and sold dry fish to the

ships that came each year from France. They were small links, close to the resource, in an elaborate, transatlantic commerce. In both the French and English fisheries the advantages and disadvantages of the resident system were fiercely argued throughout the 17th century, but the system endured and gradually strengthened. As it did, women and children appeared in the fishing harbors; populations became a little more stable. Yet there were not many such residents. Plaisance in southern Newfoundland, the largest French settlement along the Atlantic coast of North America in the 17th century, had about 20 families in 1689, all of them dependent on the fishery and on ships and labor that came each year from France. The settlement was a fishing camp with a few families and a small garrison added (most of whom also participated in the fishery), a residential toe-hold in a still largely migratory French fishery that sent some 400 ships and 10,000 men across the Atlantic each year.

FRANCE IN NORTH AMERICA ABOUT 1700

In 1700 fewer than 20,000 people of French background were scattered across North America from Newfoundland to the Mississippi. The overall pattern of their distribution had been set by the cod fishery and fur trade, and at the beginning of the 18th century many people still lived in, and many more worked seasonally in, settlements that were essentially the work camps of these staple trades. Directed toward rocky, inhospitable shores, the fishery had almost no New World multipliers, whereas the fur trade drew Europeans inland, generating towns and agricultural settlements. By 1700 Québec and Montreal were well established, and most French-speaking residents in North America lived on farms that had little to do with staple trades (Fig. 4.8).

The fur trade continued to be riverine, expansive, and interracial; the cod fishery remained maritime, static, and European. The fishery, as it always had, relied on European labor, discouraged European-Indian contact, and drew fishermen to familiar shores year after year. The fur trade, dependent on an easily depleted continental resource and on native labor, drew French traders far into the

continental interior, and Indians and Europeans together. By 1696 there were some twenty French posts west of Montreal, eight of them in the Mississippi watershed; all were tied in one direction to networks of Indian trade and in the other by canoe routes to Montreal and by ship across the Atlantic to La Rochelle, the French port of entry for almost all Canadian fur. Yet both the cod fishery and the fur trade were staple trades dependent on overseas markets. Both created wilderness settlements dominated by the specialized techniques, work routines, and transportation connections of a staple trade, and inhabited by migratory, male work forces. Put another way, both separated place of work from place of residence, detaching French capital and labor from their larger social contexts and placing them where neither tradition nor community but rather the terms of work in a staple trade would shape social relationships. In settlements near the resource a few trade-related tasks were accomplished by largely migratory work forces with as little expenditure as possible. In the fishery wharves, dry platforms, washing cages, oil vats, and cabins were put up along a shore; in the fur trade a few squared-log buildings could be constructed in days behind equally hastily erected palisades.

Although both the cod fishery and the fur trade depended on towns, the urban base of the cod fishery remained almost entirely transatlantic. Plaisance was a tiny settlement; most ships, crews, and profits of the fishery returned to France, strengthening French firms and building imposing merchant houses in some French ports. As the fur trade pushed inland, however, it required New World towns. In Acadia where the fur trade was small and scattered, Port Royal was barely a village in 1700. But in Canada in that year there were some 2,000 people in Québec and perhaps 1,200 in Montreal. Although visitors from France described them as "miserables bourgs," they were by far the most comprehensive settings of French life in North America. Their waterfronts—the lower towns—were given to commerce: warehouses, stores, cabarets, and the artisanal activities of a port. Farther from the waterfronts—the upper towns—land use was more open and institutional: forts and barracks; residences of officials; hospitals, churches, seminaries and other buildings of

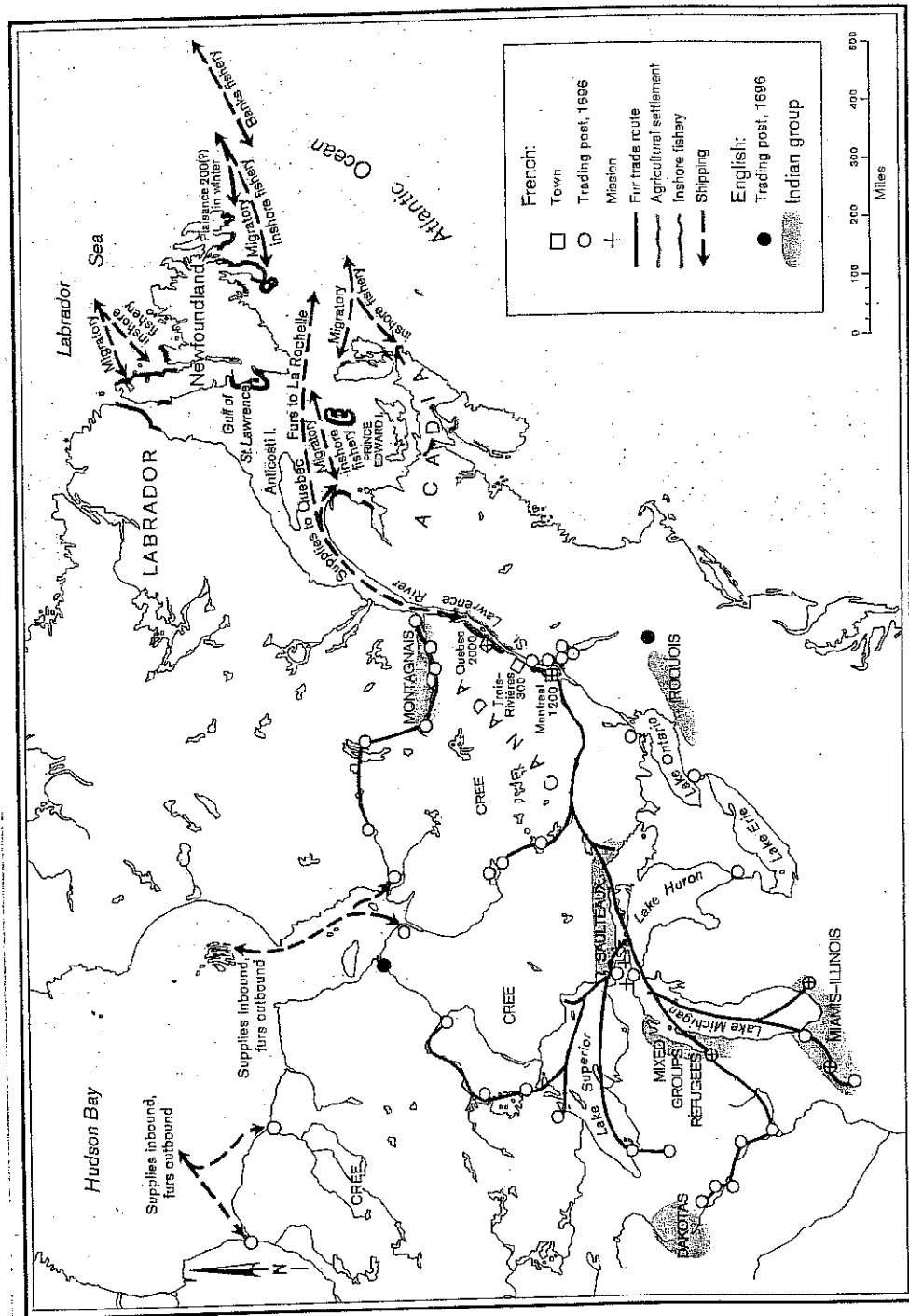


Figure 4.8 France in North America, 1700

religious orders. These towns were occupationally diverse and socially stratified, reproducing within the limits of such small places much of the fine meaning of French social hierarchy. They relied on the surrounding countryside for much of their food, and on France or the North American interior for almost everything else. The availability of land in the countryside had driven up urban wages and probably had increased the mobility of labor, conditions that favored the importation of labor-intensive manufactures and discouraged skilled, local craftsmanship.

In 1700 about 1,200 people lived around the marshes of the Bay of Fundy and 13,000 in rural seigneuries along the lower St. Lawrence—the bulk of the resident, French-speaking population of North America. In these rural settings the family farm, weakly connected to external markets, was the primary unit of settlement and economy. People lived in small farmhouses, perhaps 18 × 28 feet, built of round or squared logs and usually thatched. The simplest walls were made of vertical posts dug into the ground. More-durable houses had stone sills and either timber frame walls (variously infilled, but usually with squared logs laid horizontally) or solid walls of horizontal logs (usually cross-notched or dovetailed at the corners). Such building techniques had been common in medieval France when the forest was at hand, had largely lapsed when it was not, and reappeared where wood was again abundant. Houses built with them clustered around the Fundy marshes and lined the St. Lawrence River, one house much like its neighbor, one farm much like the next. Most crops, livestock, tools, and agricultural practices came from France. Beyond the farm were the myriad relationships (some of blood) of the local community; usually a grist mill and a parish church; and perhaps a seigneurial manor, only a little more pretentious than the peasant house. Farther away there was a town—a place that was known and sometimes visited, that sent out merchants who supplied goods beyond the capacity of local fabrication, and took farm surpluses. In some areas there was still danger of Indian attack, and for some young men there was contract labor in the fishery or the fur trade. But in large part the peasant horizon was local, and compared with France it was less beset by economic demands. As the staple

trades tended to detach specialized labor and capital from France, so these mixed agricultural economies tended to detach a peasantry. As Montreal and Québec tended to reestablish French social and occupational variety, so the countryside tended to diminish both.

In 1700, as from the beginning, the French position in North America was contested. Thirty years before, in 1670, the Stuart court in England had granted the Hudson's Bay Company all the territory that drained into Hudson Bay. English forts, established on the Bay at the mouths of the major rivers, began competing with the French for the interior trade. The English had replaced the Dutch at the mouth of the Hudson River and, allied with the Iroquois, were trading into the southern Great Lakes. There was a large English fishery in Newfoundland, and English colonies, many times more populous than New France, along the eastern seaboard. In sum the English presence in North America was far more substantial than the French.

Nevertheless, at the end of the 17th century in North America, military momentum was with the French. French forces captured the English forts on Hudson and James bays in the 1680s, although the English recaptured one of them, Fort Albany, in 1693 and held it. French troops destroyed several Iroquois villages south of Lake Ontario in 1693 and 1697, forcing the Iroquois to treat for peace, although the Hudson-Mohawk route to the Great Lakes remained in Iroquois-English control. In 1690 a marine attack by New Englanders on Québec failed miserably. In 1697 the French Crown, faced with a glut of beaver pelts, was confident enough to close most interior posts, assuming the Indians would return to Montreal. Far to the south it established three forts on the Gulf of Mexico—at Biloxi, at Mobile, and on the Mississippi River about 45 miles from its mouth—hoping to contain the English south of the Appalachians and to control access to the interior. In fact the continental interior was vast and porous, and there was not nearly enough manpower to seal it off, least of all from illegal traders operating out of Montreal. In Newfoundland the predicament was similar. In 1696–97 a combined force of French troops and Canadians under Pierre le Moyne d'Iberville sacked almost every English settlement in Newfoundland but, as there was not man-

power to hold these settlements, the English fishery returned when the attackers withdrew. In these years the one French loss in North America came a little later in Acadia. The small fort at Port Royal withstood two assaults in 1707, but fell in 1710 to a force of some 3,500 New Englanders. By the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) that ended the long French-English war known as the War of the Austrian Succession, France confirmed English title to peninsular Acadia, ceded Newfoundland (while retaining fishing rights in the north), and returned the forts on Hudson Bay. France had bargained for European advantage with North American territory and had disastrously weakened her North American position.

CHANGES IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The Treaty of Utrecht forced adjustments east and west in the French position in North America. The French migratory fishery to northern Newfoundland, protected by landing privileges, continued much as before, whereas the French fishery in southern Newfoundland, migratory and residential, moved across Cabot Strait to Cape Breton Island, which was still in French hands, and quickly reestablished itself there. On Cape Breton Island, the residential component of the fishery grew; some merchants adopted the New Englanders' practice of sending small schooners to the offshore banks. The best harbor on the island was at Louisbourg where, in 1717, the French Crown decided to build a major fortification to protect the entrance to the Gulf of St. Lawrence. A geometrical town plan was superimposed on a straggling fishing village, and massive low walls, designed to withstand artillery bombardment, were slowly built. When completed in the 1730s, Louisbourg was the largest fortification in North America, an early 18th-century fortress town built in the precise military geometry of the Vauban style on a low, frequently foggy peninsula protecting an excellent harbor that had become one of the busiest in North America (Fig. 4.9).

After the Treaty of Utrecht the French also moved quickly to restore their earlier position in the west. The ban on interior trade was lifted. Michilimakinac was reopened in 1712-

13, and trade was soon restored to the Illinois-Michigan posts. Agricultural settlement began in the Illinois country: at Vincennes on the lower Wabash and at Kaskaskia on the Mississippi above the Ohio. Colonists came from Canada, which supplied and administered these settlements until the Illinois country was made part of the colony of Louisiana in 1717. By the early 1720s there were several posts along the lower Great Lakes from Fort Frontenac at the eastern end of Lake Ontario to Detroit, their purpose to exclude English traders, while French posts north of Lake Superior cut into Hudson's Bay Company trade. Detroit and Michilimakinac became major entrepôts, receiving supplies from Montreal and furs from the west. In the 1730s traders from Montreal reached the northern Plains, establishing posts on the Red and Assiniboine rivers. By the 1740s they were on the Saskatchewan River, some 2,500 miles by canoe from Montreal. Freight canoes had become larger, carrying six men rather than three as earlier in the century. As the lines of the French carrying trade lengthened, more French labor was required in the west; by the early 1740s there are records of about 500 men leaving Montreal each year, most of them voyageurs hired to paddle canoes loaded with supplies and trade goods to specified destinations and to return with packs of fur.

To the south France moved to strengthen her hold on the lower Mississippi River and, thereby, on the whole Mississippi valley. In 1717, after almost two decades during which French settlement along the lower Mississippi had been little more than a garrison, the Crown granted a merchant company title to, and a trading monopoly in, Louisiana for twenty-five years. The company was to establish 6,000 settlers and 3,000 slaves. The next year it founded New Orleans, and began granting large properties that the company assumed would be worked primarily by indentured servants brought from Europe. Immigrants were recruited in France, the Low Countries, and Germany, and several thousand French convicts were sentenced to deportation to Louisiana. Few convicts left France, however, fewer reached Louisiana, and only a handful survived there. Some Canadians arrived overland from Montreal, but white labor was scarce and expensive. In these circumstances the company

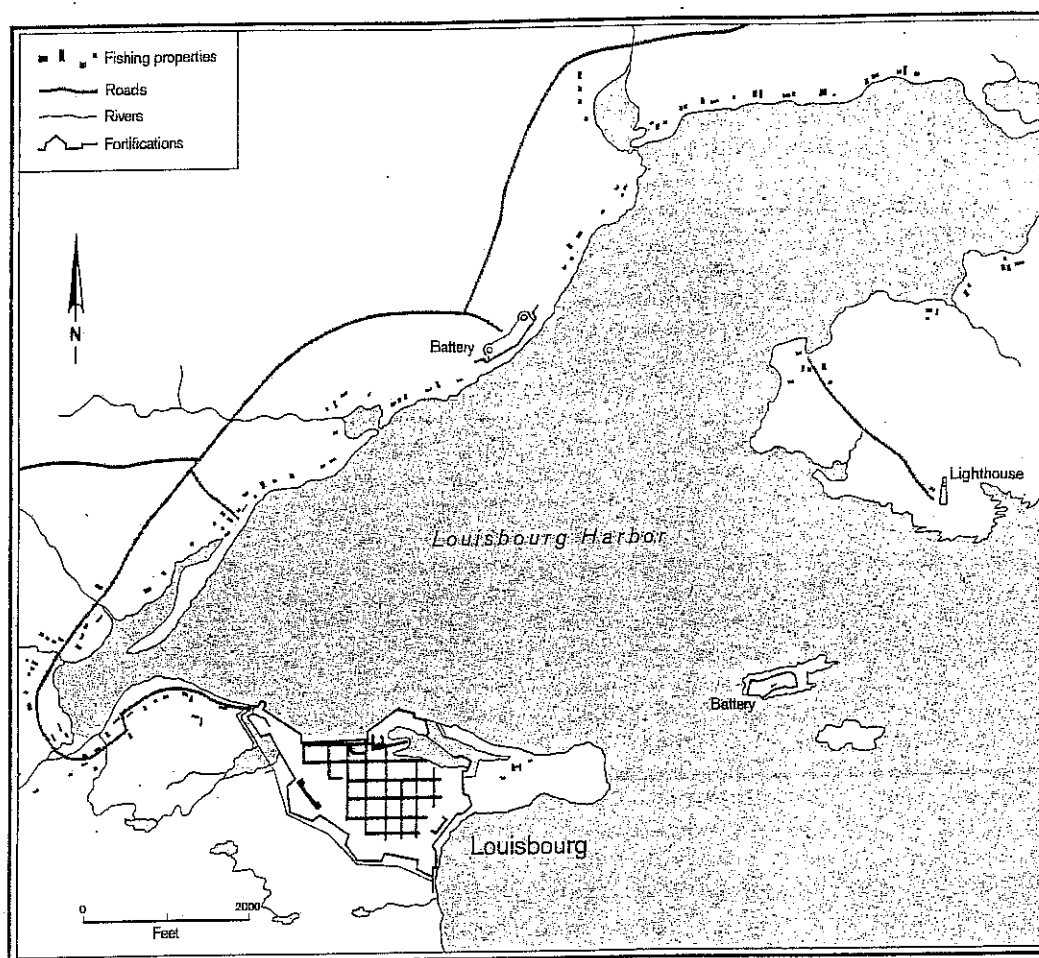


Figure 4.9 Louisbourg, 1742

turned increasingly to black slaves, the characteristic plantation labor force on the French sugar islands (Guadeloupe, Martinique, and St. Domingue, the western third of Hispaniola). By 1731 when the company's monopoly was terminated and the Crown assumed control of Louisiana, there were more blacks than whites in a non-native population along the lower Mississippi of about 4,000. Plantations worked by slaves were the principal units of production.

And yet, an export staple was not established. Sugar was a marginal crop, not competitive with island production. Mid-latitude grains grew poorly in a subtropical climate. Citrus fruits, figs, and pineapples, which did well, had no export market. Cotton could not yet be ginned. Rice, indigo, and tobacco were

more promising and became the principal plantation products together, on some of the larger plantations, with lumber and naval stores. Furs and hides (deer and buffalo) from the interior were also exported but, essentially, the struggling Louisianan economy depended on agricultural land, much of which was occupied by Indians. Initially amicable French-Indian relations soured as Indian lands were appropriated. Skirmishes and small wars broke out in which the Indians had the short-term advantage of surprise and the French the long-term advantage of fire power. Between 1729 and 1731 the Natchez, approximately 3,000 Indians living along the Mississippi some 190 miles above New Orleans, were dispersed, many of them to St. Domingue as slaves.

While these developments were taking place

along the lower Mississippi, the very different settlements along the lower St. Lawrence and in Acadia expanded within well-established patterns. There was virtually no 18th-century immigration to Acadia and, until the last decade of the French regime, little enough to Canada. Birthrates remained high; in each area the average annual population increase was more than 2 percent, most of it absorbed in the countryside where farmland was available. By 1740 there were about 40,000 French-speaking people in the St. Lawrence valley, and some 8,000 around the Bay of Fundy. Settlement had spread along the St. Lawrence River, reducing the gaps between Québec and Montreal, following minor tributaries, and extending well below Québec on the south shore (Fig. 4.10). All the habitable marshes around the Bay of Fundy were occupied by 1740, and Acadian settlement had begun on Prince Edward Island. Agricultural practices did not change, but for a time there was a little more commercial opportunity because Louisbourg created a relatively accessible market. A little Acadian wheat and some cattle found their way there in most years, usually in tiny, Acadian-built ships. Merchants from Québec also began to supply Louisbourg and to expand their cabotage in

the gulf (to supply fishing stations). From 1727 to 1742 an average of ten Canadian ships a year carried flour, meat, butter, and lumber to Louisbourg, and a few went on to the sugar islands. Then, in 1742, these trades were disrupted by the first of a succession of poor harvests along the lower St. Lawrence. Wheat prices rose, but there was no surplus for export, a condition that continued to the end of the French regime, putting a heavy lid on the agricultural economy, breaking a promising commercial connection between Canada and Louisbourg and a more tenuous one with the West Indies, slowing urban growth, and weakening the St. Lawrence colony.

The urban population in Canada and Acadia grew much less rapidly than the rural. Port Royal (renamed Annapolis Royal in 1713) remained what it had been when the New Englanders captured it—a fort and garrison with a village nearby, except that after 1710 the garrison and many of the villagers were English-speaking. With the impetus of expanding trade Québec grew quickly from 1727 to the early 1740s, but even in 1744, the date of an enumeration of the parish of Notre-Dame de Québec, only some 4,700 people were in the town. Montreal was little more than half as

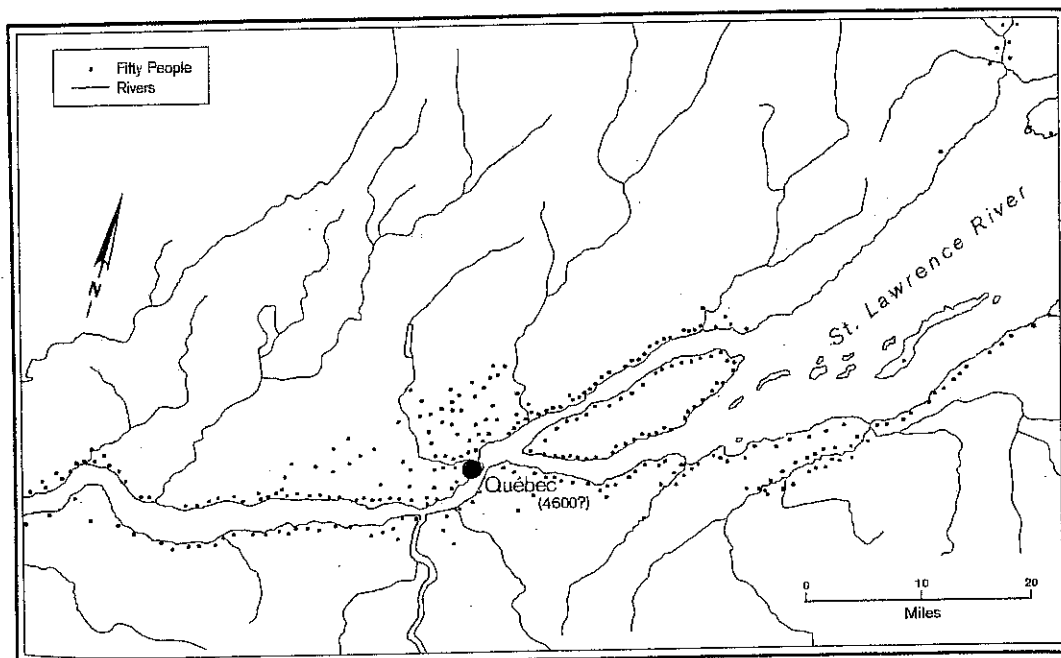


Figure 4.10 Population Distribution near Québec, 1739

large. The fur trade required the towns but generated little urban growth because most of the goods traders exchanged for furs came from France. By 1744 agricultural exports had stopped; furs, a valuable export, required only two or three ships a year. Imports involved more ships, but the small colonial market for French manufactures and foodstuffs and for West Indian molasses and rum was soon satisfied. The size of civil and clerical administrations, and even of garrisons, changed slowly. Québec and Montreal were small, stable towns in the first half of the 18th century, their economies established and circumscribed, their populations growing slowly.

FRANCE IN NORTH AMERICA ABOUT 1750

In the middle of the 18th century France claimed a vast crescent of North America from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the mouth of the Mississippi (Fig. 4.11). Such a claim was intended to deflect European rivals; within much of New France the French deferred to Indians, who regarded the land as theirs and still controlled it. Yet the French dominated the two main continental entries and far outdistanced English traders in the interior, building posts and trading through thousands of miles of Indian territory. French settlement was hardly in proportion: some 60,000 people of French descent along the lower St. Lawrence River, perhaps 2,000 along the lower Mississippi more than 3,000 miles away, more than 1,000 in the Illinois country, a few hundred around the lower Great Lakes, more than 10,000 Acadians around the Bay of Fundy (most living in British territory), and just over 5,000 people on Cape Breton Island, including those at Louisbourg. After 150 years of French activity there were fewer than 80,000 French-speaking settlers in North America. The French migratory fishery, still large and inflexible, continued to northern Newfoundland and into the gulf. Overall, the French-speaking settlements were a collection of patches strung somewhat diagonally across a continent, some linked to each other by trade, but the collection as a whole dispersed, under-connected, and vulnerable.

In the early 1750s the French fur trade

reached its zenith (Fig. 4.12). Perhaps 700 men from Montreal Island and seigneuries nearby traveled west each year, many of them to overwinter at interior posts. English traders were checked along the Great Lakes, and Montreal traders competed around the large perimeter of Hudson's Bay Company trade. The whole Great Lakes basin and upper Mississippi valley were, briefly, in French control; in 1754-55 80 percent of the North American fur trade was French, almost all of it passing through Montreal and Québec and thence, in a few ships a year, to La Rochelle. In the same year almost a million quintals (one quintal = 112 pounds or about 50 kilograms) of dried and green cod from the French fisheries in the northwestern Atlantic returned to France in several hundred ships; a relatively tiny quantity of cod went to the sugar islands. A variety of agricultural products, naval stores, and lumber was shipped from New Orleans to the sugar islands or to France. These trades were not interconnected; they all bypassed the mixed farms along the lower St. Lawrence and in Acadia, on which most French-speaking people in North America lived. It is true, however, that Kaskaskia, Vincennes, and other French settlements in the Illinois country sent salt beef, pork, and flour to Louisiana. The farms at Detroit and near Montreal provided foodstuffs and manpower for the fur trade, and some farms near Québec supplied the gulf fisheries. But the ships that brought imports from France to Québec usually sailed in ballast to Louisbourg, hoping for a cargo there. In the early 1750s the building materials and most foodstuffs imported at Louisbourg came from New England. Canadian agricultural exports had dried up. Even Acadia, close by, was a fitful supplier: a few cattle, a little grain, some knitting, a few wooden tools—a tiny fraction of Louisbourg's annual imports. Increasingly in the early 1750s Louisbourg was a mart for New Englanders, where French manufactures, West Indian rum and molasses, Cape Breton fish, and New England foodstuffs and building supplies were traded and bills of exchange earned on French firms. Prosperous merchants in Louisbourg traded into the North Atlantic rather than toward Canada, Acadia, or Louisiana. Despite many official projects to the contrary, it had not proved possible to create an integrated commercial system out of the differ-

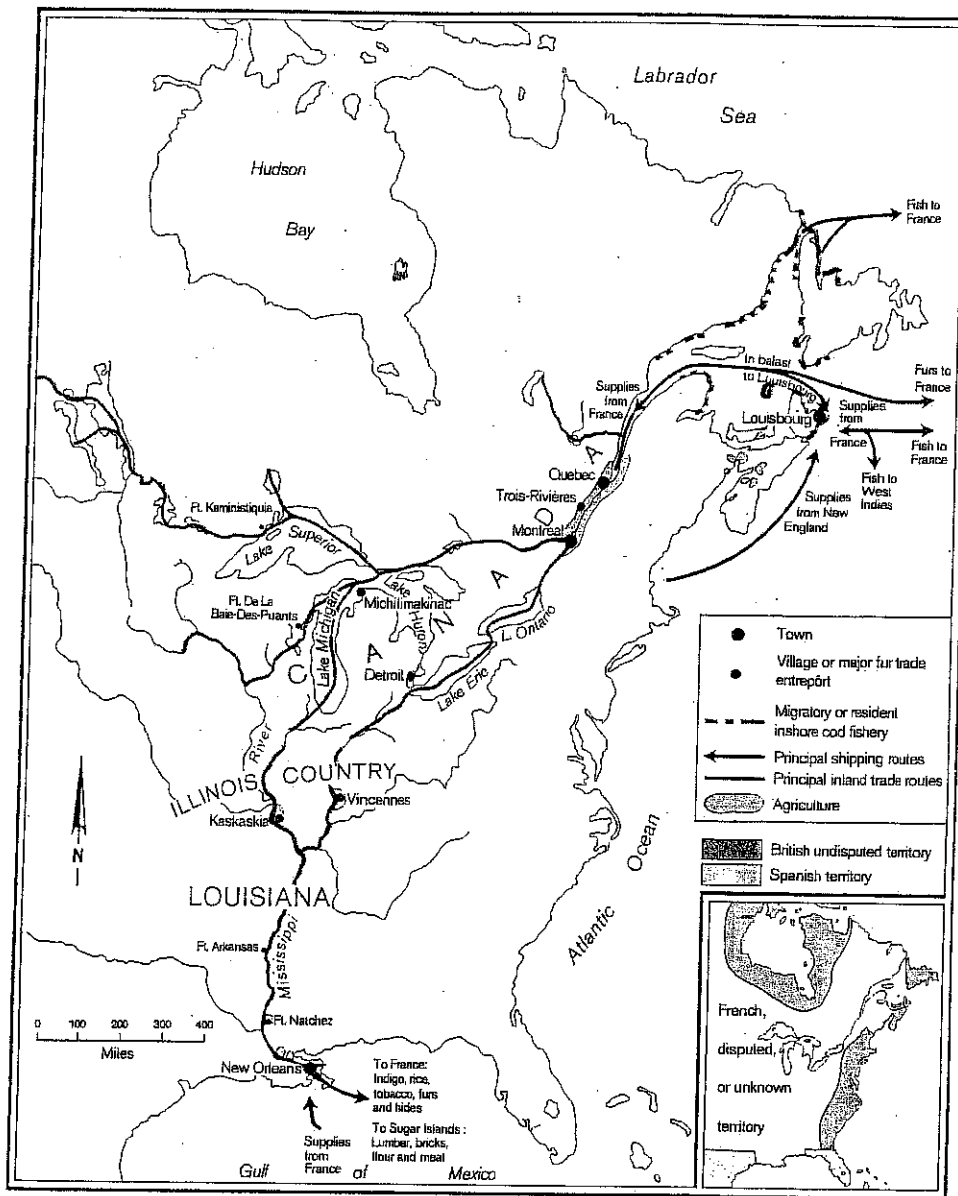


Figure 4.11 France in North America, ca. 1750

ent, widely separated spatial economies of New France.

Therefore, there was no one urban hierarchy. New Orleans controlled the Mississippi trade north to the Illinois country, Québec and Montreal controlled the St. Lawrence trade, and Louisbourg participated in North Atlantic trade. All were well connected to France and, excepting Québec and Montreal, little connected to each other. Yet all were colonial

French towns with important commercial, military, and administrative functions. Commerce dominated their waterfronts, and institutional buildings their upper towns. Merchants, colonial officials, and officers dominated their social structures. Urban society was sharply hierarchical, status-conscious, and deferential although, as in other towns of the day, people of very different standing lived side by side. In many ways the towns of New France resem-

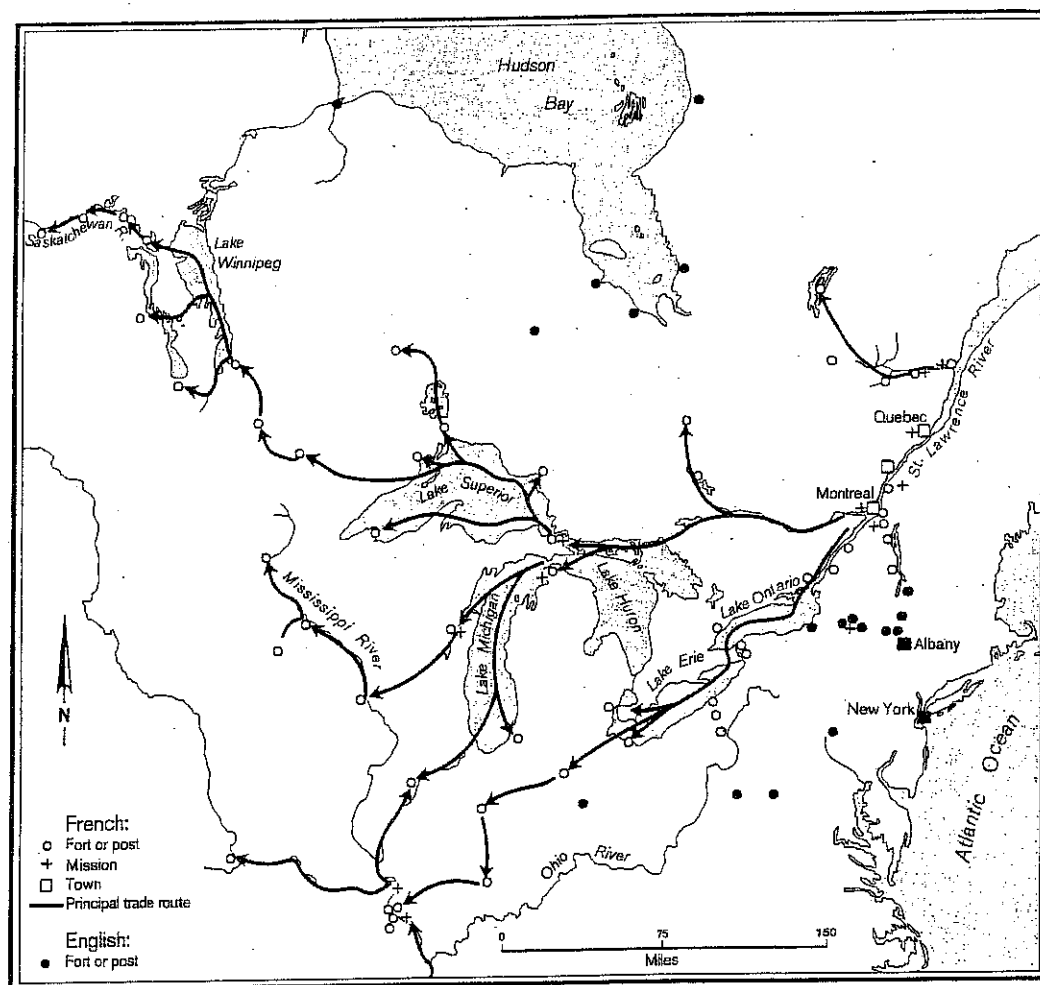


Figure 4.12 The French Fur Trade, early 1750s

bled their French equivalents. Montcalm, the French commander at Québec, considered that Québec, which had just over 5,000 people in 1750, was as fine as any town in France after the first ten. Of course they were new, they were not centuries of architectural accretion, and they were composed of people of many regional backgrounds. In New Orleans there were many black and some Indian slaves in a population of perhaps 1,200. In all the towns the cost of labor was high. There were no guilds, apprenticeship was much less defined than in France, and small labor-intensive manufactured goods were usually imported. In Québec rough footwear was made locally, whereas most fine shoes came from France, although there were skilled craftsmen—wig-

makers, cabinet-makers, sculptors, and silver-smiths—in the town as well as the rougher trades associated with the port and with construction. The oldest and largest of the towns of New France, Québec was the most like a French provincial capital.

Of these towns Louisbourg has been the most closely studied. Its economy was dominated by trade (including the fishery) and by the garrisons, and its society by colonial officials, officers, and merchants. There was a great deal of occupational mobility, but the occupational choice was limited because almost all manufactured goods were imported. Officers participated in the fishery, *habitants-pêcheurs* became innkeepers or importers. Shoes, cloth, most clothing, kitchenware, and

fine furniture came from France. Inexpensive furniture came from New England. Culturally, Louisbourg was a melting-pot, drawing people from many parts of France, from elsewhere in Europe, and from Acadia, Canada, and even New England. Its women were more likely to be North American born than its men; husband and wife characteristically came from different regional backgrounds. In six houses along one waterfront block lived heads of households or their wives born in France, Portugal, Louisbourg, Acadia, and Canada; and, at the social extremes, the *commissaire-ordonateur* (the principal civil official in Louisbourg) and a fisherman's widow.

Because a good deal of Louisbourg has been rebuilt after much research, its 18th-century appearance is accurately known. The architecture of all the principal buildings reflected current French taste, just as the layout of fortifications reflected current French military engineering. The appearance of lesser buildings, most of them of timber-frame construction variously infilled, was less bound to current style and more dependent on techniques of construction. Gardens, always small in Louisbourg, were laid out geometrically, as was the town itself which, like New Orleans, was a rectangular grid of streets, walled. In Québec and Montreal officials discouraged wooden buildings because of the fire hazard. By 1750 most houses were of stone, their shingle or plank roofs punctuated by spare dormers and massive chimneys. Usually they were built contiguously on narrow lots. Size was gained by height; the largest houses of successful merchants had four stories above the basement. In New Orleans, where local stone was not available, most buildings were of timber-frame construction with brick infill. Otherwise the architectural styles and the techniques of construction of the northern towns also prevailed in New Orleans.

In 1750, as earlier, rural Acadia and Canada remained somewhat detached from this urban world. Some 13,000 Acadians had dyked all the available marshes, and many of them, fearful of English intentions and short of land, were moving to Prince Edward Island, still in French hands. Acadian agriculture remained what it had been in 1700: mixed, largely subsistent, family centered, and primarily dependent on the marshlands. Acadian society may have be-

come a little more stratified, although there is very little evidence one way or the other and no suggestion of wealth in any settlement around the Bay of Fundy. A few Acadians had become farmer-merchants, masters of tiny ships that they sailed to Boston or Louisbourg. Essentially the Acadians remained a peasantry who, by the mid-18th century, were several generations removed from France. Descended from a tiny founding population, they had coped with a common and very distinctive environment and, although there were imported goods in their houses and English troops at Annapolis Royal, had mixed relatively little with the larger world of the North Atlantic.

By the early 1750s some 50,000 rural people of French descent lived along the lower St. Lawrence, almost all of them members of farm families. As the population grew the countryside became somewhat more differentiated. There were now several agricultural villages housing a priest (*curé*) and perhaps the seigneurial family; a few artisans and perhaps a merchant agent or two besides farm families. More seigneurs were able to profit from their land rent and domainal farms; manor houses became more common and a little larger. A few merchants in Montreal and Québec prospered from their dealings in the countryside, while a few farmers in long-settled areas near the towns worked as much as 75 acres of cleared land and relied on hired labor. As they lived near the quarries that served Québec and Montreal, their houses were usually of stone. Yet the continuing availability of land somewhere in the colony, if not near the parental farm, and the weakness of the export economy slowed the pace of social and economic differentiation. The countryside could still yield a rough living for most, and was only slowly yielding much more for a few.

In the Illinois country opportunities were quite different. The largest concentration of French settlement was in five villages, inhabited by some 1,000 whites and 500 black and Indian slaves, along the Mississippi River between the Missouri and the Kaskaskia. Father Vivier, the Jesuit who served these settlements, estimated that two-thirds of their agricultural production was exported. Wheat, beef, pork, and some livestock on the hoof were sent to New Orleans, destined for the sugar islands. Corn, which was not exported, yielded abun-

dantly and was the food of cattle, slaves, and natives. The largest landholder in the village of Kaskaskia worked some 500 acres of arable land and owned sixty slaves (including some women and children) and many hundred cattle, swine, and horses. Most settlers had very little arable land and presumably lived primarily from hunting and the hide trade, but almost 70 percent of white families were slave-owners. In the Illinois country, French settlement from Canada had reached a bounteous land suitable for arable and pastoral farming and within range of a market. A small, ethnically mixed population was growing rapidly, its economy vigorous, its society sharply stratified. Vivier considered the Illinois country the pivot of the French effort to hold the vast continental crescent between the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Gulf of Mexico. In many ways he was right, but a few villagers far in the interior were a fragile pivot for continental ambition. The region needed more settlers and more years than it was ever allowed.

Almost 500 miles along the river south of Kaskaskia, a garrison fort at the mouth of the Arkansas River was the most northerly outpost of French settlement on the lower Mississippi and a way point for convoys to and from the Illinois country. A few settlers had farmed there until driven off by the Chickasaw in 1748. At Natchez, some 190 miles farther south, there was another garrison, again penned in by the Chickasaw, and good but underused tobacco land. At Pointe-Coupée, halfway between Natchez and New Orleans, agriculture was more secure, tobacco being the principal crop. There was a German settlement 20 miles above New Orleans; below the town both banks of the river were occupied almost halfway to the sea. Throughout these plantations blacks considerably outnumbered whites (a census of 1763 enumerated 4,539 blacks and 2,966 whites along the lower Mississippi). Slaves were used to produce subsistent crops such as potatoes, corn, and vegetables, to work in rice, indigo, and tobacco fields, and as laborers in saw mills, brickyards, and in the preparation of naval stores. Some forty ships were reported to have called at New Orleans in 1750, most coming from Martinique and St. Domingue for lumber and bricks. The colony also exported a variety of goods to France—principally indigo, tobacco, rice, furs, and hides—but

in 1750, as previously, Louisiana was a considerable financial liability to the French Crown. The settlements along the lower Mississippi were set around by hostile natives and still had not established an export staple. After the initial burst of immigration in the first years of the merchant company, the population had grown very slowly.

A plantation worked by slaves was an efficient means of harnessing year-round work for labor-intensive, market-oriented productions in tropical or subtropical environments. It was unsuited to the weakly commercial, seasonal agricultural economies of northeastern North America, while the cod fishery and the fur trade, both labor-intensive, had also solved the problem of labor very differently. Some 8,000–10,000 fishermen still crossed the Atlantic each year from France. In fishing harbors in northern or western Newfoundland, on the Gaspé Peninsula, or on Cape Breton Island, these men and boys were accommodated minimally, worked incessantly, and subjected to iron discipline. The lots of fisherman or shore worker in the fishery or of slave on a plantation were not very different except that for one there was eventually a return voyage, some pay, and some choice of subsequent work—but not very much choice for poor people. The fur trade continued to rely on Indian hunters and trappers spread across much of the continent, and on a relatively small number of whites to maintain trading posts. By 1750 Fort Detroit, the largest entrepôt in the fur trade, was a walled village with a winter population of 400; far to the northwest along the Saskatchewan River in western Canada, new forts comprised a few buildings behind hastily built palisades—minimal winter accommodation for a few whites living among little-known and untrusted Indians.

CONCLUSION

The French position in North America, vast, scattered, and underpopulated, was lost during the Seven Year's War. In 1755, before the war officially began, British officials in Acadia, distrusting the French-speaking population they loosely governed and encouraged by Boston merchants who stood to earn lucrative contracts, decided to deport the Acadians. Many Acadians fled to Canada or to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, but many others were caught and sent to the English colonies to the south. Where

Louisbourg fell in 1758 after a massive siege, the French could no longer protect the gulf. Acadian refugees there were rounded up and sent to England or France. In 1759 another large British force laid siege to Québec and after a summer's bombardment took the town. Surrounded, the French army in Montreal capitulated the next year. New France was lost. The British effort to take it had cost some £80 million, the French defense about a twentieth as much. At the end, as throughout, France's involvement in North America had been half-hearted. Furs from Canada were only 5 to 10 percent of the value of French colonial imports, 1 to 2 percent of the value of all imports. Louisiana had been an expense rather than a revenue. The fisheries seemed more important than either Canada or Louisiana. France bargained for them and, in the Treaty of Paris ending the Seven Year's War, retained fishing privileges in northern and western Newfoundland and two small islands, St. Pierre and Miquelon, south of Newfoundland. Canada and all of Acadia were ceded to Britain; Louisiana was ceded to Spain. From a French perspective the loss of New France was not devastating and might even encourage the English seaboard colonies, freed from French threat, to revolt.

In North America the fall of New France changed the control but not the pattern of the spatial economy. The Acadian lands were reoccupied by New Englanders who would soon practice much the same semisubsistent agriculture as their predecessors. Louisbourg was abandoned and demolished, but the fisheries continued, with the French migratory fishery now confined to northern Newfoundland and to St. Pierre and Miquelon. In the St. Lawrence valley Montreal and Québec retained their older functions under new management. Their populations declined after the conquest, then grew very slowly. The countryside remained French-speaking, and rural life stayed much as it was. The connection with the west quickly resumed, employing the techniques and reoccupying and expanding the space of the Montreal fur trade at the end of the French regime. Increasingly the merchants were English-speaking. Plantation agriculture continued in the lower Mississippi valley, now in Spanish hands, to which, over the years, many Acadian refugees made their way. The different econo-

mies of the former French possessions in North America were no more integrated than they had been under the French.

Early in the Revolutionary War American troops attacked Canada, assuming that the French-speaking inhabitants of the St. Lawrence lowlands, recently conquered by the British, would rally to the American cause. A few did, the invaders captured Montreal and laid mid-winter siege to Québec. But British troops held the town, local support for the Americans evaporated and, in the spring when British reinforcements arrived, the invaders fled. The old French colony along the St. Lawrence had held against its former enemies and at the end of the war was the core of the British position in North America. In the peace settlement of 1783 an international border was drawn from the St. Lawrence River through lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron, and Superior, placing Grand Portage, the principal entrepôt on the north shore of Lake Superior, on the American side. A canoe route beyond Lake Superior to the northern Plains was barely retained, while the more southerly reach of the St. Lawrence fur trade into the Ohio valley and the Mississippi valley was lost. The small, vigorous, quite distinctive, but too belated settlements in the Illinois country would soon merge in the tide of American westward expansion. In the east, Newfoundland remained British, as did the territory the French called Acadia, renamed Nova Scotia. In effect, Britain retained the original French economies in North America: the cod fishery and the fur trade based on the St. Lawrence, the towns which the fur trade had created, and the semisubsistent agricultural economies that had emerged in its train—patches of settlement bounded by uncultivable land and separated by distance along the northern edge of North American agriculture. Over the years the fur trade and cod fishery would continue, as detached as ever from each other. Other staple trades would reach into northern North American space, and towns would emerge to serve them. Agriculture would continue in patches, and none of the patches would be very well connected to each other. Economic, social, and political life would evolve within this fractured economic space, along the northern inhabitable edge of a continent, as it had done throughout the French regime.

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