



Profil de la ville de la Rochelle, capitale de l'Aunis
[View of the city of La Rochelle, capital of Aunis],
by Aveline, late 17th century
FR AD17 1 Fi La Rochelle 131



New France
NEW HORIZONS

Departure

European fishermen had plied the North Atlantic by the thousands since the 16th century. They came from the Basque country, Brittany, Normandy and La Rochelle to fish for cod and hunt whales off the coast of the "Newfoundland" and in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence River. In setting up fish-drying installations on shore, fishermen came in contact with the Aboriginal inhabitants—this contact gave rise to the fur trade. It was also the age of discovery and exploration in search of a route to the riches of India and China. In competition first with Spain, then with England, the kings of France strove to extend their influence in the New World. The adventure in Canada started with the individual initiatives of King Francis I and King Henri IV, and also those of a few adventurers, noblemen and sailors; the first settlements and foundings date from the early 17th century. In 1627, under Cardinal Richelieu, a true colonial policy began to take shape, while French trade and maritime interests were given a decisive boost. With the rising number of employment contracts, emigration became organized, which helped populate the colony with skilled tradesmen. Moved by a similar zeal to spread the Gospel, both lay people and clergy embarked along with them. To further the colony's development, these voluntary emigrants were later joined by soldiers, who were encouraged to settle in Canada as well as the *filles du roi* [daughters of the King] and occasionally, a few salt smugglers and other petty criminals.

Points of Departure

In the age of discovery, the French ports along the Atlantic shoreline and the English Channel were naturally attracted to the New World. From Bayonne to Dieppe, by way of the salt-rich ports of Saintonge, such as Brouage (birthplace of Samuel de Champlain), ships travelling the sea routes with North America supplied all of France with cod. When the fur trade and colonial settlements began to develop, La Rochelle became the favourite embarkation point for emigration and commerce with the colonies.



Plan de Brouage pour servir aux projets de l'année 1729
[Map of Brouage, to serve for the projects of the year 1729]
FR AD17 5 Fi Brouage 1



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Farewell to France



Marc Lescarbot, a parliamentary lawyer in Paris, learned of New France from one of his clients, Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt, who took part in Pierre du Gua de Monts' colonization efforts in Acadia. Lescarbot decided to set out for Port Royal (Annapolis Royal), where he spent an entire year. He left Paris in 1606, stopped in Orléans for Easter, and then made his way to La Rochelle, his port of departure. Author of several literary and poetic works, he wrote the poem "Adieu à la France," which he recited in public and had printed in La Rochelle on April 4, 1606, before embarking on his voyage.

"Adieu à la France", a poem by Marc Lescarbot, in *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France contenant les navigations, découvertes et habitations faites par les François ès Indes Occidentales et Nouvelle-France souz l'avoëu et autorité de noz Roys Tres-Chrétiens, et les diverses fortunes d'iceux en l'execution de ces choses, depuis cent ans jusques à hui*, Paris, Chez Jean Millot, 1612, p. 511-515. CA BNC Réserve F5057 L39 1612



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La pesche des morues vertes et sèches sur le Grand Banc et aux costes de Terre-Neuve [Green and dry cod fishery on the Grand Banks and the coast of Newfoundland], detail from a map of North and South America, by Nicolas de Fer, 1698

CA ANC NMC-26825

Fishing Voyages

Even before the explorations of Giovanni da Verrazzano (1524) and the discoveries of Jacques Cartier (1534-1536), French sailors regularly crossed the Atlantic to Newfoundland. In fact, fish became a highly prized foodstuff in Europe in the 16th century. The voyages organized by ship owners and merchants sailing from port cities such as La Rochelle, as well as cod fishing, were based on various types of contracts. One of these, the charter party, which governed the conditions of the transaction, was copied out twice on the same sheet to prevent falsification, with each of the parties concerned given one half. The sedentary fishing practised by the first ships along the coast of the New World provided contact with the Aboriginal people, since the fish was salted and dried on land. These fishing posts were not always successful. In 1663, the Compagnie de la Nouvelle-France ceded to François Doublet, a merchant from Honfleur, the Îles de la Madeleine, Île Saint-Jean, Île des Oiseaux and Île Brion—land that was previously granted to Nicolas Denys. Doublet set out with 25 men. On Île Brion, he encountered Basques who were hunting seals. He erected storage sheds and a dwelling; he hunted and fished. Doublet returned to France in the fall of 1663, leaving about 20 men to spend the winter on the island. The next spring, he found it deserted and the structures in ruins.



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Letters patent granted to Pierre du Gua de Monts as Lieutenant-General, November 8, 1603
FR CAOM COL C11A 1 fol. 58-61vo

The Royal Will

From Francis I to Louis XIV, the will of the French monarchy was to extend its glory and influence abroad, in order to successively rival the Spanish and English crowns. The backing by the kings of France began with Giovanni da Verrazzano's explorations in 1524 and Jacques Cartier's first voyage in 1534. The plan Cartier devised for Francis I to establish the French in Canada was first put into action in 1541, when the King signed a commission in favour of Jean-François de La Roque, Sieur de Roberval, making him his Lieutenant-General in Canada and the Commander-in-Chief of the expedition. Cartier was placed under his orders. In addition to the wish to Christianize the Aboriginal inhabitants, there were more material concerns: finding and exploiting precious metals. The goal was also to found a colony to be populated with men and women of all stations and occupations from the provinces of France. This attempt ended in failure. In 1603, Henri IV made Pierre du Gua de Monts his Lieutenant-General, with authority over all the territory in North America, between 40 degrees and 46 degrees, and the right to grant seigneuries and a ten-year monopoly on trade with the "savages." The King also commissioned him to help propagate the faith. Assisted by Samuel de Champlain, Du Gua de Monts established his first colony on Île Sainte-Croix and then moved south, where he founded Port Royal. In 1608, he entrusted Champlain with the responsibility of establishing a new trading post in the St. Lawrence Valley, at the future site of Québec.



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Contract between Jeanne Mance, residing on the Island of Montréal, and Jacques Mousnier, merchant of La Rochelle, for the transport to Québec, aboard the ship *Saint-André*, of 31 persons, including women and children, May 5, 1659
FR AD17 3E 316 fol. 83

The *Engagés*

To ensure the colony's growth, labourers, carpenters, masons and domestic servants were regularly recruited in France. They were generally employed under contract or indentured for a period of three years. In exchange for their work for a set period of time, the recruiter paid the cost of passage and provided wages, lodging and food. Even if, in some cases, employers promised to pay for return passage at the end of the contract or provide the indentured workers with the means of subsistence and establishing themselves in the colony, the difficult living conditions sometimes induced people to return to France. Indentured workers made up a large number of the emigrants; in all, nearly 4,000 went to New France.



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The Salt Smugglers

Because New France remained sparsely populated, it had to rely on external demographic contributions. In addition to the indentured workers, soldiers, officers, nuns, *filles du roi* and families that accounted for the majority of immigrants, the sons of noble and upper-class families and libertines were exiled there at their families' request. Added to these were convicted petty criminals, poachers and salt smugglers, who might become useful colonists. Several hundred salt smugglers settled in Canada between 1730 and 1749.



Letter from Jean-Frédéric Phélippeaux, Comte de Maurepas, Secretary of State for the Marine, to Charles de Beauharnois, Governor General, and Gilles Hocquart, Intendant of New France, on the subject of sending salt smugglers and other poachers to the colony, May 1, 1731
FR CAOM COL C11A fol. 71-72



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