



A view of the Orphan's or Ursuline Nunnery, taken from the Ramparts by Richard Short, September 1, 1761
CA ANC C-000358



Daily Life

Daily life in New France was subject to the hardships of a harsh climate, which decimated the first settlers, and to the insecurity of the constant threat of armed conflict with the English and the Aboriginal peoples. The population was composed initially of small, isolated groups of men travelling throughout the country. An organized society did not take shape until the creation of the royal colony in 1663, with the establishment of an administration by the Church and the monarchy, the arrival of new immigrants (who brought with them the traditions of various provinces of western France), and the development of urban communities centred around hospitals and educational establishments. To some degree, this early social structure mirrored that of France under the Ancien Régime. The elite consisted of nobles, which included military officers and government officials, and merchants. The hierarchy was strict, and all were obliged to respect the differences between groups and individuals. Signs of distinction such as manners, attire and education were instant indicators of a person's social status, and the regulations governing everyday life were designed to ensure that these were maintained. The social structure in the colony was less rigid than in France, and before long, individual status became less a matter of birth than of merit, talent and usefulness. The spectrum of social positions narrowed, and the population gradually integrated characteristics that reflected the influence of the land, the climate, and contact with the Aboriginal peoples. During the 18th century, most of the colony's inhabitants defined themselves as Acadians or Canadians

A historical document, a summary table from a 1685 census of Canada. The table is printed on aged, yellowish paper and is organized into a grid with multiple columns and rows. The text within the grid is small and difficult to read, but it appears to be a detailed record of population data. The table is framed by a thin black border.

General census of Canada, summary table, 1685
FR CAOM COL G1 461 fol. 3-3v°

The Population

The Royal Administration in New France applied its policy of getting to know the population of its kingdom by carrying out regular censuses. This type of enumeration was not conducted in France until the reign of Napoleon I. As a result, more is known about the number of inhabitants, family structures, trades and urban-rural distribution in the colony than in the other provinces of France. Low immigration during the 17th and 18th centuries meant that despite high birth rates, the population remained small: in 1760, there were some 85,000 inhabitants, as compared to 2 million in the English colonies. Canada accounted for some 75,000 people, concentrated mainly in the St. Lawrence Valley; 5,000 lived in the areas of Acadia still under French rule, which comprised Île Saint-Jean (Prince Edward Island) and Île Royale (Cape Breton Island), with Louisbourg as the main settlement; 900 inhabited the *Pays d'en haut* (the Great Lakes region) and the outpost at Detroit; and 4,000 inhabitants lived in Louisiana.



New France
NEW HORIZONS



Letters of nobility of Robert Giffard de Moncel,
seigneur of Beauport, March 1658
CA ANC MG18-H1

The Nobility

Like their counterparts in French society, the nobles of New France, though few in number, occupied a position of privilege. Favoured by the Crown, which granted them seigneuries, fur-trading licences and positions in the civil administration, they were for the most part military officers who played an important role in the various wars and negotiations with the Aboriginal peoples. Being noble did not, as in France, preclude commercial activity, and offices conferring nobility could never be bought. Nobility was granted for personal merit and by order of the King. To the 170 nobles who immigrated—Claude de Ramezay, for example—were added 11 Canadians. One of these was Robert Giffard, who received letters of nobility from the King of France "in the hope we cherish that being honoured to this degree and with a noble title in the country of New France that he will emulate the actions of the nobility and that he and his family will render us the services that those in this position owe to us." After the Treaty of Paris of 1763, many nobles left the colony, and those who remained had difficulty holding onto their rank and fortune.



New France
NEW HORIZONS

Slavery

An ordinance issued by the Intendant Jacques Raudot in 1709 officially acknowledged the practice of slavery in the colony. The number of slaves who lived in Canada, mostly in the cities and towns, can be estimated at about 2,500 over the whole period. In contrast to the economies of Louisiana and the West Indies, which depended on intensive plantation farming, the colony's economy required relatively little labour, and almost all its slaves worked as domestic servants in the families of military officers, merchants and government officials, and even for members of the clergy. Only a third of the slaves were of African descent. The majority were Aboriginal people known as *panis* (so called after the Pawnee tribe, from the Missouri region). Slavery endured in Canada until the end of the 18th century, but was not abolished in the English colonies until 1833, and in the French colonies until 1848.



Ordonnance de Mr Raudot intendant de Canada qui ordonne que les panis et negres acheptez et qui le seront par la suite appartiendront a ceux qui les auront acheptez [Ordinance from Monsieur Raudot, Intendant of Canada, ordering that the *panis* and negroes bought now and in the future shall belong to those who bought them],
April 13, 1709
FR CAOM COL C11A 30 fol. 334-335



New France
NEW HORIZONS

The Important Stages of Life

Regardless of their social status, the lives of the inhabitants of New France were recorded in the many official papers produced at key moments in their existence—birth, marriage and death, entry into a religious community, old age, the separation of a couple. These documents enable a reconstruction of the diverse destinies of individual men and women, and give a glimpse of their extended family and the ties they maintained with France. They also contain references to the objects used in their daily lives and to their financial situations. Visual images of the inhabitants of Canada and their lifestyles are, however, extremely rare.



Habitans de Canada [Inhabitants of Canada],
ca. 1676-1710
CA ANC Collection Peter Winkworth P1617



New France
NEW HORIZONS

The Regulation of Everyday Life

As the population grew, particularly in the cities and towns, and the colony's administration was gradually established, daily life in New France became increasingly regulated. There were also many strict religious interdicts issued by the Church of New France. This new zeal was brought on by the influence of the Catholic Reformation, and was much concerned with the moral discipline of the inhabitants. A remarkable number of rulings, ordinances, statutes and pastoral letters were issued on every aspect of life, particularly areas where the civil and religious authorities perceived a threat to public order and safety. The fact that some of these rulings had to be repeated many times is an indication of how difficult it was for the State to apply them, given the lack of methods of coercion and repression.



Ordonnance de M. Raudot intendant de Canada, qui deffend aux habitans de Québec de laisser aller les chiens vicieux dans les campagnes [Ordinance from Monsieur Raudot, Intendant of Canada, prohibiting the inhabitants of Québec from allowing vicious dogs to run loose in the country], June 6, 1709
FR CAOM COL C11A 30 fol. 340-340v°



New France
NEW HORIZONS



Concession of land by the Compagnie de la Nouvelle-France to the Jesuits for the building of a college in Québec, March 18, 1637
CA ANC MG8-F61

Education

Education was almost exclusively the responsibility of the Church. In the cities and towns (Montréal, Québec, Louisbourg and Trois-Rivières), instruction was provided by religious orders such as the Ursulines, the Charron Brothers, the Sulpicians and the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame. Primary schools were created to teach reading, writing and arithmetic, and by 1760, there were about 30 schools for boys and 15 schools for girls. The schoolteachers, who were sometimes itinerant, came under the control of the parish priests. There were also two trade schools, one in Saint-Joachim and one in Montréal, where young men could learn a profession or craft. New France's only institution of higher learning was the Jesuit College in Québec, where there was a chair in hydrography and professors who taught law, chemistry, physics, geometry and the art of navigation. Education was accessible to a minority of the population, and very few people were able to sign their name. Only a few members of the elite possessed a library.



New France
NEW HORIZONS



Plan, section and elevations of the hospital of Louisbourg, signed by Étienne Verrier, engineer, 1725
FR CAOM 3DFC 153B

Medical Care

Although the colonial population suffered occasional epidemics of smallpox and typhus, they were less devastating than those that struck in France. A medical corps consisting of a small group of doctors, surgeons and apothecaries looked after the health of Canadians. The Intendants played a vital role in establishing an efficient medical system and introducing public health regulations. There was particular concern for the medical care offered to soldiers, for example, and also related to the introduction of midwives, whose status was strictly controlled by the authorities. Generally speaking, people were born and died in their own homes. The sick were cared for in hospitals that resembled those in Europe: there was one ward for men and another for women, and a chapel whose altar had to be visible to all patients. The Hôtel-Dieu and general hospitals in Québec, Montréal and Trois-Rivières were founded and run by female religious communities; their doors were open not only to the sick, but also to poor people, beggars and the elderly, who were expected to help with the work. Most of the plant and mineral products used in the colony's pharmacopoeia came from France, although a number of indigenous plants and some Aboriginal practices were integrated over the years.



New France
NEW HORIZONS



On en bannist les boissons [Drinking is prohibited],
from the *Narration annuelle de la mission du Sault*
[Saint-Louis]..., by Father Claude Chauchetière,
1667-1686
FR AD33 série H Jésuites fol. 10

Taverns and Inns

Many taverns, easily identifiable by their signs, were to be found in the cities and towns of New France including Québec, Montréal and Louisbourg. Such establishments could also be found in the country. For the working classes, they were a place to meet and exchange ideas, and the civil and religious authorities regarded them with suspicion, seeing them as locations of potential violence and debauchery. Inns, which were less common, provided accommodation and nourishment to the elite visiting the towns. Professional cooks, usually from France, worked for the colony's leading personages, or ran pastry shops, catering businesses and inns. The sale of alcoholic beverages, kept under close surveillance by the administration, was subject to numerous regulations designed to preserve moral standards among both Aboriginal peoples and the French population. The most popular drinks were wine, Bordeaux in particular, and spirits. Other types of wine were also imported to the colony from Champagne, Navarre, the Canary Islands and Frontignan, and locally brewed beer was consumed regularly by the inhabitants.



New France
NEW HORIZONS