



*Canada or Île Royale. Drawing of a house, 18th century*  
FR CAOM COL F3 290 n° 78

## Settlement

In the early days of the colony, the French transplanted the seigneurial system to the St. Lawrence Valley, which established a land ownership arrangement similar to the one existing in France at the time. Inherited from the Middle Ages, of which it retained the symbols, it enabled the King to secure the loyalty of new seigneurs, or lords, who in turn derived prestige and honour from their rank, while benefiting from the revenue produced by the land they were granted. The system was applied in New France without much planning. The King's representatives in Canada attributed territories of varying sizes as fief and seignury to nobles and religious communities. In the 18th century, ecclesiastical seigneuries accounted for 25 percent of the seigneurial lands and were among the most populous fiefs. The nobility received quite a large proportion of the concessions, considering their small numbers. From the outset, the desire to make waterways accessible to as many people as possible determined the layout and shape of the land concessions. These were generally in the form of long rectangles fronting on the St. Lawrence River or another river. After the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the wealthier English and certain French-speaking bourgeois acquired several seigneuries belonging to descendants of the nobility; the Church continued to hold a large portion of the fiefs. The seigneurial system, although suppressed in France by the Revolution, survived in Canada until 1854.



New France  
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## The Inhabitants of Québec

The first seigneuries granted in the St. Lawrence Valley constitute the oldest nucleus of population. At the close of the 17th century, this region was densely populated compared to the rest of the colony. The layout of the farmland was determined by the desire to make waterways accessible to the greatest number of inhabitants. This parcelling of land into rectangular holdings fronting on the water resulted in a scattered settlement. The star-shaped villages of Charlesbourg and Bourg-Royal are rare examples in New France of grouped dwellings in a rural milieu.

*Carte des environs de Québec en la Nouvelle-France*  
France [Map of the vicinity around Québec in New France]  
showing the names of the inhabitants and the dwellings,  
by Robert de Villeneuve, king's engineer, 1688  
FR CHAN Marine 6JJ 61 pièce 32



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Concession of a seignury, made by Louis de Buade de Frontenac to Jacques Bizard, October 24, 1678  
CA ANC MG8-F138

## The Seigneuries

When a person or community was granted a seignury, certain obligations had to be met: rendering fealty and homage; ceding land to those who requested it; maintaining and having tenants maintain "hearth and home;" reserving the oak wood for the building of royal ships; and acknowledging the King of France had ownership of the subsoil. The awarding of a fief had to be confirmed by the King. Seigneurs could sell the land they were granted. The price of a seignury was generally proportional to its level of development: the more numerous the  *censitaires* , the more was its selling price. The purchaser of a seignury was required to pay the  *droit de quint* , a tax collected by the state equal to one-fifth of the sale price. A seigneur could cede part of a seignury as an  *arrière-fief*  [sub-fief]. The holder of this land had the same rights and obligations as the seigneur; however, he owed fealty and homage not to the King, but to the seigneur who ceded him his  *arrière-fief* .



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Concession from Intendant Jean Talon to Pierre de Saurel,  
October 29, 1672 (copy, January 14, 1774)  
CA ANC MG18-H54 2 p. 483-490

## The Seigneury of Sorel

The officer Pierre de Saurel arrived in the colony in 1665 with the Carignan-Salières Regiment—troops dispatched from France meant to contain the Iroquois threat. He was immediately sent with his men to rebuild and command Fort Richelieu (soon after named Sorel) where the Iroquois (Richelieu) River flows into the St. Lawrence River. When the regiment was discharged in 1668, he married and settled on a tract of land he was granted in 1672 for "services rendered to His Majesty." Saurel then devoted himself to developing his seigneurie. In 1682, shortly before his death, it included a manor, a communal mill, a well-developed property and more than 25 *censives* [land parcels]. However, his widow, harassed by her late husband's principal creditor, had to put the seigneurie up for auction. Claude de Ramezay, Governor of Montréal, purchased it in 1713 for 9,200 livres. The fief's new holder made his land prosperous: in the *aveu et dénombrement* [inventory] of 1724, the year Ramezay died, the seigneurie included 80 *censives*. In 1764, the seigneurie of Sorel was sold for 24,000 livres to an English merchant from Québec, John Bondfield.



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Cadastral map of Batiscan, seigneurie of the Jesuits,  
ca. 1725  
FR CAOM COL G1 461

## Batiscan

The seigneurie of Batiscan is the classic model of the division of territory within a fief in the St. Lawrence Valley. It displays an overall geometric regularity. The portions of land, or *censives*, allotted to each of the habitants were long contiguous rectangles, perpendicular to the water's edge. The dwellings were lined up along the shore. With this arrangement, each tenant had access to the water and could use the river as a means of transportation. When all river front land was granted, the seigneur began a second *rang* [row] of concessions.



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Deposit of a *billet de concession* in the seigneurie of La Durantaye on June 12, 1693 granted by La Durantaye to Pierre Audet, from the records of the notary Claude Barolet, July 14, 1752  
CA ANQ-Q CN301 S11/17

## The *Censives*

The holder of a seigneurie was obliged to concede a parcel of land (the *censive*) to individuals (the *censitaires*) who requested it. In many cases, the seigneur did not immediately provide an official certificate of concession, but instead first issued a deed of temporary ownership called a *billet de concession*. The two parties later signed a duly notarized contract. In possession of this final deed, the *censitaire* might "enjoy the use [of his land] in full ownership in perpetuity," sell it or bequeath it, as long as he fulfilled the obligations stipulated in the contract. One of these stated that he had to deliver the annual *cens* and *rentes*, fixed dues payable in perpetuity in money or in kind. The *cens* was minimal, and served above all as a symbol of the *censitaire's* dependence on the seigneur; however, the *rente* was a greater amount. The land parcel was subject to the right of *lods et ventes*, a tax equivalent to one-twelfth of the amount of the sale, which every land buyer had to pay the seigneur.



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Concession of a site in the city of Québec, by Governor Jacques-René Briasay de Denonville, and Intendant Jean Bochart de Champigny, to Michel Guyon de Rouvray, April 13, 1689  
CA ANC MG18-H9

## Concession in Québec

The towns of Québec and Trois-Rivières were part of the domain of the King, who was the seigneur of these two urban centres. His representatives—the Governor General and the Intendant of New France—were in charge of assigning lots within these towns, in exchange for dues and certain obligations. Montréal was different, as its territory had been ceded as a seigneurie to the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice.



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*Arrêts du roi pour la réunion des terres si elles ne sont pas mises en valeur* [Royal edicts concerning the restitution of land that is not made productive], Marly, July 6, 1711  
FR CHAN Marine A1 46 pièces 33-34

## The Edicts of Marly

Louis XIV and his ministers strove to limit the exploration of new territories, in favour of clearing the land. As a continuation of this policy, the edicts of Marly confirmed the King's desire to expand the population of New France by encouraging the cultivation of the land. A first edict stipulated that seigneuries that were not made productive would be withdrawn from their holders and returned to the royal domain. This measure, however, was seldom invoked. A second edict applied to the *censitaires* [tenants] and obliged them to make their land productive, or have it return to the seigneurial domain. In addition, the seigneurs were obligated to cede lots to those who asked for them. It was also forbidden for them to sell land that had not been ceded to a *censitaire*.



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## Rights and Obligations

Abuses and irregularities in the contracts of concession between seigneurs and their *censitaires*, or tenants, were frequently denounced by the intendants. They proposed remedies: standardizing the rates of *cens* (a token payment to the seigneur) and *rentes* (a more substantial annual payment in kind or in money), and eliminating or modifying a number of rights, such as the *corvée* (unpaid manual labour), the right to remove wood from the habitants' land, the right to retake land into their own possession, and fishing rights.



Report [of Intendant Jacques Raudot] proposing various changes to the rights and obligations established by the seigneurs of Canada, ca. 1707

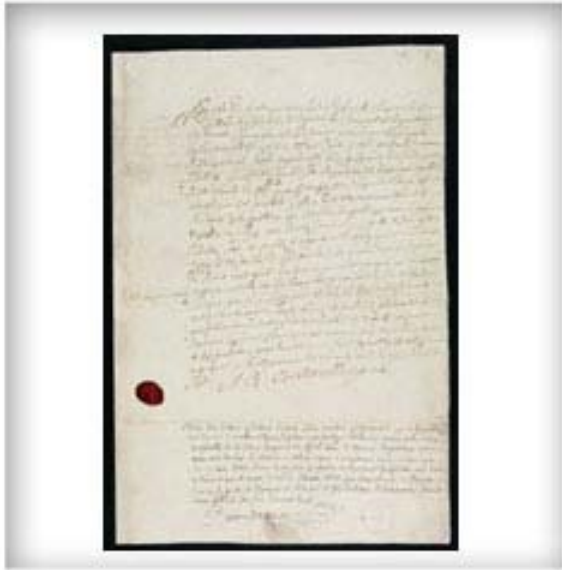
FR CAOM COL C11A 27 fol. 118-119v°



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## The Financial Administrator

Each seigneurie held, but did not necessarily exercise, the right to administer justice. In cases where it was exercised, the seigneur named officials: a judge (called a seneschal, provost, bailiff or seigneurial judge, according to circumstance), a financial administrator and a clerk who often also served as a notary and bailiff. They were paid by the seigneur.



Commission as financial administrator and notary of the seigneurie of Argentenay, granted to Paul Vachon by Marie-Barbe de Boullongne, November 3, 1667  
CA ANC MG8-F100



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## The Communal Mill

The *droit de banalité* ensured the seigneur's monopoly on the building and operation of flour mills in his fief. Tenants were obliged to use them and pay their seigneur a fee of one *minot* in fourteen. The seigneur, for his part, was required to maintain the mills in good working order.



Petition to the Secretary of State for the Marine,  
Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, Comte de Maurepas,  
by Michel Morin, on behalf of the habitants of the  
Rivière du Sud, concerning the poor maintenance of the  
communal mills by the seigneur,  
Charles-Marie Couillard de Beaumont,  
ca. 1743  
FR CAOM COL C11A 81 fol. 104-105v°



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