

HISTORY OF QUEBEC

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PREHISTORY AND FIRST PEOPLES

The Gulf of St. Lawrence was home to First Nations groups, most of them Iroquois, prior to the European settlement. The Iroquois were a farming people who cultivated fields of corn, beans, squash, tobacco, and sunflowers. They lived in villages consisting of arrays of longhouses: communal domestic spaces capable of housing up to a dozen families through the region's harsh winters. The Iroquois built their communities around shared principles of fishing, farming, and responsible autonomy.

Archaeological and ethnohistorical research indicates that St. Lawrence Iroquois governed their societies by superior and supernatural forces, drawing lore from the natural world around them. The life of a community was expressed through feasting, dancing, taboos, healing rites, and animal sacrifices. Spirits were invoked to ensure a bountiful harvest, to guarantee favourable outcomes to conflict, or grant wisdom and guidance. The Iroquois were learned in the medicinal properties of plants and the power of healing ceremonies.

The St. Lawrence Iroquois made use of their environment in all aspects of their lives. Their tools were hewn from rock and shaped from the wood of the forest; their clothing tanned from the hides of their hunt, sewn with needles of bone. Their brightly coloured garb was dyed with vegetable oils and decorated with beads fabricated from shells. As with other First Nations, the Iroquois travelled by birchbark canoe, ubiquitous symbol of Canada—an aesthetically perfect synthesis of form and function that allowed them to penetrate deep into the country's wilds.

Further east, nomadic Mi'kmaq frequented the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Settlements were traditionally characterized by a group of one or more households alongside a river or a bay subsisting through an economy of fishing and hunting. The Mi'kmaq were among the first peoples to be affected by European activities in the New World and underwent early depopulation and sociocultural disruption. Their territory included all of what is now Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec, the north shore of New Brunswick and inland to the Saint John River watershed, eastern Maine, and part of Newfoundland, including the islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence as well as Saint Pierre and Miquelon.

The first known European contact was made in 1497 by John Cabot, who took three Mi'kmaq with him when he returned to England. Contact between Mi'kmaq and Europeans became routine immediately afterwards. Beginning in 1501, Basque, Spanish, French, British, and Irish fishing boats visited the Grand Banks every summer. By 1519, fishermen were coming

ashore to dry their catch, and trade began, mainly for furs. The fishermen found the Mi'kmaq friendly and eager to trade.

The relationship between Mi'kmaq and Europeans became contentious when the Mi'kmaq began to convert to Catholicism. The Mi'kmaq Nation's first treaty with a European nation was an agreement with the Vatican and the Holy See. During the colonial period, Mi'kmaq were allied with the French. As a result, when the British defeated the French in 1763, Mi'kmaq were regarded with suspicion by British authorities.

The government attempted to integrate Mi'kmaq throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; these attempts not only resulted in a loss of language and culture, but also left Mi'kmaq socially isolated. A forced relocation scheme in the 1950s posed the greatest threat to them as a distinctive people. However, Mi'kmaq have been able to salvage some of their traditional culture in political decision-making, religion and language. Notably, Mi'kmaq placed a strong emphasis on painting, music, and oratory; tribal leadership was based upon prestige and wisdom rather than power.

GASPÉ

The Gaspé Peninsula in eastern Québec covers more than thirty thousand square kilometres. Bordered by the St. Lawrence River to the north and Chaleur Bay to the south, the peninsula is famed for its magnificent rock formations and an abundance of fossils from the Devonian Period. Three national parks lie within its boundaries.

The Gaspé mountains are an extension of the Appalachians, which formed over hundreds of millions of years as the result of three separate episodes leading to the assembly of the supercontinent Pangea. This accumulation of continental pieces created massive folds and thrust up mountains along the entire chain, including the Gaspé Peninsula. The height and ruggedness of the Appalachians would, at that time, have rivaled the modern European Alps.

Later geological events revealed the record of Ordovician, Silurian and Devonian marine life that had been buried among sediment layers on a former seafloor. Some of these fossils can be seen at Miguasha National Park.

The fishing village of Percé lies near Percé Rock ("pierced rock."), one of the world's largest natural sea arches. Named by Samuel de Champlain in 1607, the five-million-ton limestone rock towers almost ninety metres (three hundred feet) over the water. The limestone itself formed more than four hundred million years ago during the Devonian and the rock's present height attests to the massive forces that created this landscape. Today it erodes at the rate of three hundred tons every year. Apparently, when Jacques Cartier visited in 1534, it had three arches; a second collapsed in 1845.

Gaspé is the gateway to the St. Lawrence River, created following the last glaciation, which links the interior of the North American continent with the Atlantic Ocean. The St. Lawrence played an important role in the history of Canada's fur trade and early settlement.

The Gaspé Peninsula has been occupied for at least six thousand years and probably much longer. The ancestors of today's Algonkian-speaking people established hunting and fishing camps at Penouille near Forillon National Park and other sites on the Peninsula. The name Gaspé may derive from an Algonkian word meaning 'land's end'.

The national park encompassing Percé Rock and Ile Bonaventure contains over 200,000 breeding birds of eleven species including 116,000 gannets. Other seabird species include murrelets, razorbills, kittiwakes, puffins, gulls and cormorants. Blue, humpback, fin, and minke whales—as well as dolphins and porpoises—are seasonally present in the waters off the peninsula and in the St. Lawrence River.

NEW FRANCE AND ACADIA

France was a colonial power in North America from the early sixteenth century to the late nineteenth century. The European nation's presence on the continent was marked by economic exchanges with the Aboriginal peoples—but also by conflict with them—as France tried to control the vast territory. The French settlement of the St. Lawrence region was driven by trade and expansion, but also by religious motivations, and their Jesuit missions form an important part of the area's history.

Though France became interested in North America later than their European neighbours—England, Spain and Portugal—their expansion into the region began in earnest with Jacques Cartier. Cartier made three voyages of discovery for France, taking possession of the territory in the name of France by planting a cross on the shores of Gaspé in 1534. Over the next decade he would plumb the resources of the area, famously returning to France with a cache of gold and diamonds that turned out to be iron pyrite and quartz—"fool's gold".

In 1608, Samuel de Champlain, a founder of New France, erected a settlement at the present-day site of Quebec City. He continued Cartier's work of exploration and trade, dreaming of finding a route to the Indies; he also pursued the commercial interests of France. This led to the subsequent explosion of a booming fur trade, and within half a century, almost 3,000 people called New France home. 1,200 of them were Canadian-born.

It was during this time that evangelization among Indigenous peoples flourished. Inspired by the Catholic Counter-Reformation, the Jesuits renewed notable mission Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons, but managed to convert precious few Aboriginal persons. Champlain and his men made enemies of the Iroquois by aligning themselves with their Huron enemies and the years that followed were typified by violent conflict between the French-Huron and British-Iroquoian factions.

By 1663, Quebec was seen as a commercial and political failure, and would remain so until Louis XIV made the colony a

province of France and imposed a hierarchical system of organization. The Seigniorial system, as it was called, allowed efficient farming of the St. Lawrence basin's fertile land—and the king had over eight hundred women sent across the Atlantic as brides-to-be. Quick marriages and families were encouraged by monetary incentive.

Acadia was a colony of New France, and included parts of eastern Quebec as well as the Maritime provinces and modern-day Maine. The first capital, Port-Royal, was established in 1605—though it was burned by a British force from Virginia in 1613, it was subsequently rebuilt and remained the longest-serving capital in French Acadia until the British conquest in 1710. Over seventy-four years and six colonial wars, Acadia was a site of French-British conflict, and would remain hotly contested until the eventual expulsion of French Acadians who refused to swear fealty to Britain. In 1763, the Treaty of Paris ceded almost all of New France to Britain, and the Acadian population was deported.

TADOUSSAC

The oldest surviving French settlement in the Americas, Tadoussac is a small town of just under a thousand souls beside the confluence of the Saguenay and St. Lawrence Rivers. The name could be either Innu or Mi'kmaq, as both have words with those syllables referring to geographical features—possibly the round hills behind the town or the rocky beach that frightens Zodiac drivers.

Historically, Tadoussac was visited by Jacques Cartier during his second voyage in 1535, when he encountered Innu seal hunters there. The town was founded at the end of that century as a fur trading post by wealthy sea captain Pierre de Chauvin and his partner François Gragé du Pont, but the harsh winter that followed claimed the lives of all but five of those left in charge of the settlement, and these survived only because of the intervention of native benefactors. During the seventeenth century, Tadoussac became the main fur-trading and whaling port along the St. Lawrence.

The upwelling of nutrients as the cold, fresh water of the Saguenay meets the warmer saltwater of the St. Lawrence supports huge amounts of krill, tiny marine crustaceans that are a favourite food of many whale and other marine species. In turn, these support the town's active market for whale-watching tourists and Canada's first national marine park.

Tourism is nothing new to Tadoussac. The area became a summer playground for wealthy Upper Canadians during the nineteenth century. The present-day Hotel Tadoussac was built after its 1864 predecessor was demolished in 1942. The Poste de Traite Chauvin Historical Museum is a replica of Chauvin's original house as drawn by Samuel de Champlain in 1603.

MAGDALEN ISLANDS

Les Îles de la Madeleine (Magdalen Islands) is a hundred-kilometre-long archipelago located in the middle of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It consists of a dozen islands, the seven largest connected by tombolo beaches and a mostly-paved road. Lying over enormous salt domes, the islands are geologically part of the Appalachian Region, and at the end of the last glaciation were still part of the mainland. Overtaken by rising sea levels about five thousand years ago, today the Magdalens consist mostly of eroded sandstone rock and sand; the highest elevation is Big Hill at 174 metres, on Île d'Entrée.

The Islands were used seasonally by Mi'kmaq, who called them Munagesunok—meaning "islands beat by the waves." Basque and Breton fishermen dried and processed fish on the extensive, flat beaches, and in 1534, Jacques Cartier visited the islands and named them "Les Araynes", a poetic word for sand. Awarded to Nicolas Denys in 1672, the islands were definitively named in honour of Madeleine Fontaine, wife of the islands' second seigneur, François Doublet. In 1591, the first battle in North America between the English and the French took place here. When the British began deporting the Acadians from what is now the Maritime Provinces in 1755, several families escaped to the Magdalens, followed by other families from Miquelon in 1793 after a long period of tit-for-tat attacks at St. Pierre-Miquelon at the end of the eighteenth century. Other settlers came from Scotland and Ireland in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In 1787, Britain's George III ceded the islands to Captain Isaac Coffin, who subjected the inhabitants to seigneurial tenure, a feudal system whereby tenants worked the land but were not permitted to own it. Many left and settled on the North Shore of Québec. The Seigneurial System was abandoned in Canada in 1854, and later the islands became part of the province of Québec. Very few of the twelve thousand Madelinots have purchased their lots since provincial legislation was enacted in 1895 and most lots are still subject to rent which the province does not collect. Houses are painted in bright colours and stories are told that fishermen used to coordinate the positioning of their nets by aligning the relative position of these colours on shore.

The administrative centre of the regional county municipality of Îles de la Madeleine is Cap-aux-Meules, with a population of 2,000, near the centre of the archipelago. Fishing, especially for lobster, is the main industry. The collapse of the Northern Cod fishery and the subsequent moratorium of 1992 threw many Atlantic Canadian fishers out of work. Aquaculture of mussels began in 1986 and there is growth in the agriculture sector. The island's sealing industry was shut down in the 1980s due to pressure from animal activists—although it has recovered somewhat in recent years. The 360-million-year-old salt dome closest to the surface is located under Grosse-Île at the north end of the Magdalens and rock salt, used for road de-icing, has been mined there since 1982. Tourism growth is such that the population of the islands triples during the summer season with visitors mainly coming from the rest of Québec and the Atlantic provinces.

EUROPEANS ARRIVE

Norse explorers sailed into the Gulf of St. Lawrence around the year 1000 AD as evidenced by the discovery of butternuts (which never grew north of New Brunswick) in the archaeological remains of their settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland. This camp was eventually abandoned along with their Greenland settlements, and the Norse retreated to a Scandinavian base.

Many convincing arguments have been made that suggest that knowledge of the New World remained current in European ports and that others, particularly fishermen, made the voyage before Columbus or John Cabot, who sailed to Labrador, the island of Newfoundland and/or Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia in 1497 and claimed it all for Britain. He thought it was Asia. When Jacques Cartier sailed to North America on behalf of France in 1534, he encountered other ships in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, as Portuguese, Basque, Breton, and English sailors had been fishing there for years.

Within a few decades of Cartier's explorations, thousands of fishermen and whalers were sailing to the Grand Banks and into the Gulf every spring, trading with the Mi'kmaq for furs, providing guns, metal implements and European clothing in exchange, along with liquor, to which natives had no resistance. Fish was a vital commodity in Europe due to Catholic restrictions on eating meat, and whale oil 'lit the lamps of Europe' in the days before geology provided substitutes.

The European policy of exploitation of North America's natural resources caused the decimation of Mi'kmaq populations and the complete extinction of the Beothuk people of Newfoundland, the Great Auk, the Passenger Pigeon, and regionally, the walrus, caribou and wolf.

In 1598, fresh off his victories in the Wars of Religion, France's Henri IV gave the Marquis de La Roche title to France's North American territories in Canada with the duty to plant a settlement. La Roche dumped fifty beggars and soldiers on Sable Island, a forty-kilometre-long sandbar, 175 kilometres from the nearest part of the mainland of Nova Scotia. For the next few years, they managed to survive with occasional ship visits and beachcombing, but in 1602 no ship appeared. By the time a ship managed to get back to check on their progress in the spring of 1603, only eleven men remained after a horrific winter of hunger, murder and mayhem.

In 1603 Pierre Du Gua de Monts established Port Royal on the Nova Scotia side of the Bay of Fundy as the first successful agricultural settlement in Canada. By 1700 there were over a thousand Acadians and fifty years later, with a healthy environment and diet, early marriage and low mortality, they numbered over ten thousand.

The French brought the Roman Catholic religion to the Mi'kmaq and allied with them against the British. But soon war with Britain left France's overseas possessions in jeopardy and in 1745 its 'impregnable' Fortress at Louisbourg fell for the first time. After it was returned with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, British land and sea forces took Louisbourg for the last time in 1758.

The British feared the Acadians despite their claims of neutrality. Partly, this was fear of the Mi'kmaq who sided with the French. After trying—mostly unsuccessfully—to force them to take an oath of loyalty the British began expelling the French population from Acadia in 1755. The roundups and deportations continued until 1763, the end of the Seven Years' War.

By the Treaty of Paris, France was allotted two small islands off the south coast of Newfoundland, St. Pierre and Miquelon, and retained Louisiana. Although some Acadians tried to return to Nova Scotia, others left behind opted to leave, unwilling to endure British rule. Some scattered to remote places like the Antilles while several hundred removed to the remaining French territory of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon. These unlucky ones would endure five or six more deportations to and from France due to the mother country's entanglements over the next forty years.