

#1

# Description of New France

Excerpt from letter written by Louis Armand de Lom d'Arce, dated May 2, 1684.



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

May 2, 1684

## Description of New France

... The whole Country being a continued Forrest of lofty Trees, the Stumps of which must be grub'd up (removed), before they (habitants) can make use of a Plough. Tis true, this is a troublesome and chargeable (difficult) task at first; but in a short time after they make up their losses; for when the Virgin ground (land that has never been used for growing crops) is capable of receiving Seed, it yields an increase to the rate of an hundred fold (doubling the rate 100 times). Corn is there sown in May, and reap'd (harvested) about the middle of September .... All sorts of Grain here are very cheap, as well as Butchers Meat and Fowl. The price of Wood is almost nothing, in comparison with the charge of its carriage (transport), which after all is very inconsiderable.

... In this Country everyone lives in a good and a well furnish'd House; and most of the Houses are of wood and are two Stories high. Their Chimnies are very large, by reason of the prodigious (large) Fires they make to guard themselves from the Cold, which is there beyond all measure, from the Month of December, to that of April. During that space of time, the River is always frozen over, notwithstanding the flowing and ebbing of the Sea; and the Snow upon the ground, is three or four foot deep ...

(Signed)

Louis Armand de Lom d'Arce

Louis Armand de Lom d'Arce Lahontan, *New voyages to North America* (London, UK: H. Bonwicke et al., 1703), pp. 7–8, 10 | CIHM no. 37429, from Early Canadiana Online, produced by Canadiana.org

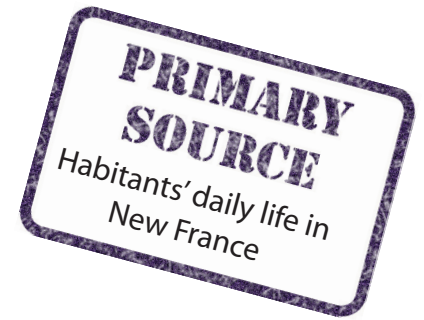




#2

## Travelling to Québec City

Excerpt from the Ordinance of Bigot, written in 1749 by François Bigot, Chevalier, Counsellor to the King councils, Intendant of justice, the police, finance and the naval forces of New France, in response to concerns about pedestrian and vehicle traffic in New France.



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

### The Ordinance of Bigot - 1749 Pedestrian and Vehicle Traffic in New France

Given the report that has been made to us, according to which, to the prejudice (bias) of various police regulations, the carters and other persons of this town, and even the inhabitants of the countryside who come here, drive their carts with such speed that they often no longer master (have control of) their horses and knock over carts in their way as well as people on foot who are not given sufficient (enough) time to step out of the way; and since it is necessary to remedy (fix) such incidents, which can be unfortunate, as has already been observed.

We forbid all persons that drive a cart, or that mount horses, to have them gallop or go at full trot in the streets of this city; we command them, when they find people on foot in their way, to stop and even to turn aside, to give them time to step away; all of the above under pain of (with the threat of) a fine of twenty pounds for the offenders, payable without discount, applicable to hospitals and of more severe sentences in case of subsequent offence (being caught more than once).

We command the police officers to be zealous (enthusiastic) in the execution (applying) of the present ordinance (law), which will be read, published and posted in the customary manner, so that no one can claim the excuse of ignorance.

- Francois Bigot

Musée de la civilisation, bibliothèque du Séminaire de Québec, fonds ancien. Elie de Salvail, 366 anniversaires canadiens, Montréal, Les Frères des écoles chrétiennes, 1930, 646p. 295.5.21





## #3

## Travels into North America

Excerpt from a book written by Peter Kalm, a Swedish-Finnish explorer and scientist who wrote about his travels in North America between 1748 and 1749. The sections below were taken from the 1771 English translation of *Travels into North America* by Peter Kalm.



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

### Travels into North America by Peter Kalm - 1749

When there is room enough in the hospital, they likewise take in some of the sick inhabitants of the town and country. They have the medicines, and the attendance of the surgeons, gratis (free), but must pay twelve sols (coin in New France, there were 20 sols in a French livre) per day for meat, etc.

... Every Friday is a market-day, when the country people come to the town with provisions, and those who want them must supply themselves on that day, because it is the only market-day in the whole week. On that day likewise a number of Indians come to town, to sell their goods, and buy others.

... All the farms in Canada stand separate from each other, so that each farmer has his possessions entirely distinct from those of his neighbour.

... The farm-houses hereabouts are generally built all along the rising banks of the river, either close to the water, or at some distance from it, and about three or four arpens (180 metres) from each other. To some farms are annexed (attached) small orchards; but they are in general without them; however, almost every farm has a kitchen-garden.

... The farm-houses are generally built of stone, but sometimes of timber, and have three or four rooms. The windows are seldom of glass, but most frequently of paper. They have iron stoves in one of the rooms and chimneys in the rest. The roofs are covered with boards. The crevices and chinks (gaps) are filled up with clay. The other buildings are covered with straw.

Peter Kalm, *Travels into North America*, vol. III, John Reinold Forster, trans. (London, UK: T. Lowndes, 1771), pp. 74, 79–80, Internet Archive

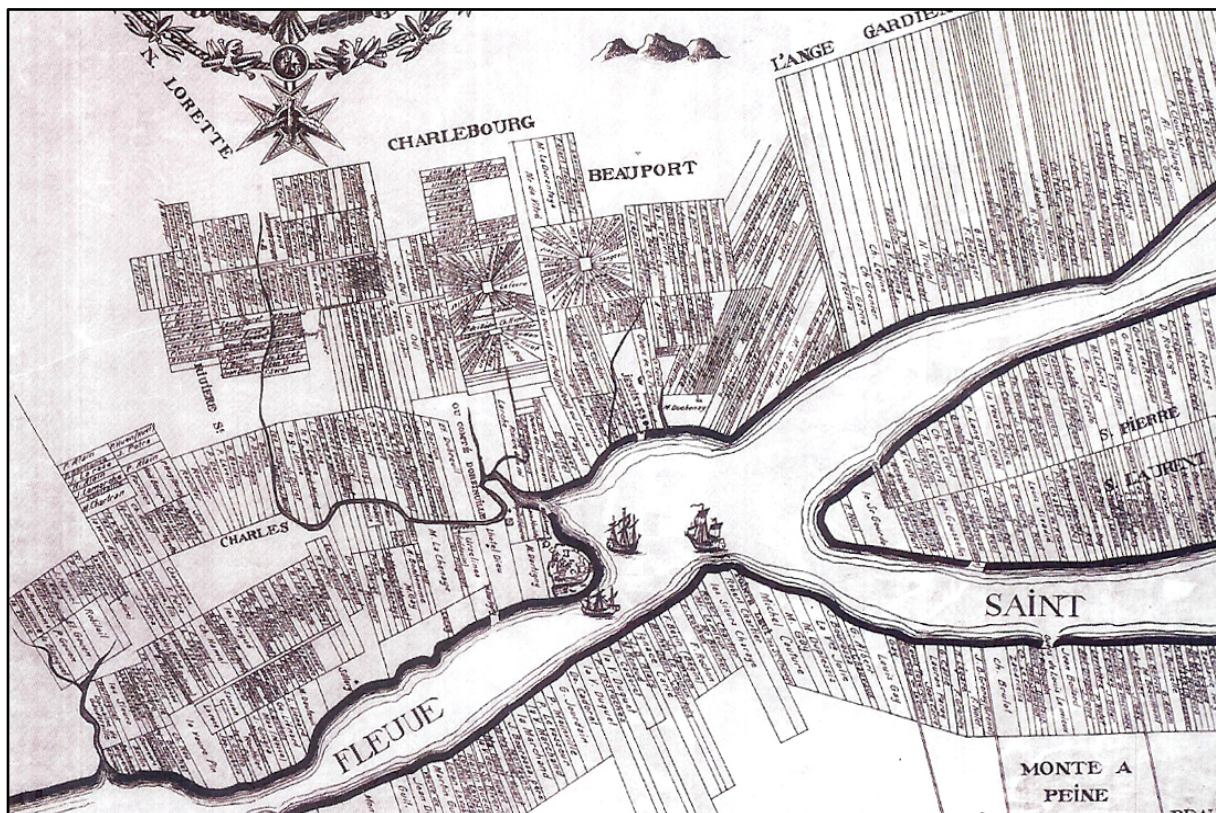


#4

## Map of seigneuries

Map drawn of New France settlements on the banks of the St. Lawrence by surveyors Gédéon de Catalogne and Jean-Baptist de Couagne in 1709.

**PRIMARY SOURCE**  
Habitants' daily life in New France



Gédéon de Catalogne and Jean-Baptist de Couagne, Historical atlas of Canada: Canada's history illustrated with original maps, Derek Hayes, ed., (Vancouver, BC: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002), p. 76.



#5

## Perceptions of habitants

Excerpt from a document written in 1737 by Gilles Hocquart, a minor noble, and the intendant of New France from 1729 to 1748. The document was most likely intended for a government minister serving in the French government.



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

### Habitants of New France

The Canadians are husky, well built, and of a vigorous (strong, healthy) temperament. As trades are not dominated by specialization, and since, at the establishment of the colony, tradesmen were rare, necessity has made them ingenious (resourceful) from generation to generation. The rural inhabitants handle the axe adroitly (skillfully). They make themselves most of the tools and utensils (apparatus) needed for farming, and build their own houses and barns. Many are weavers and make linen ....

They love honours and praise, and pride themselves in their courage, and are extremely sensitive to criticism and the least punishment. They are self-seeking (take advantage of opportunities), vindictive (seek revenge), subject to drunkenness, make much use of liquor, and are not the most truthful people.

This characterization suits the majority, especially the rural inhabitants. Those in the city have few faults. All are attached to religion. One sees few perfidious (disloyal) people. They are fickle, and have too high an opinion of themselves, which lessens their abilities to succeed in trade, agriculture, and commerce.

Add to this the idleness occasioned by the long and rigorous (demanding) winters. They love hunting, sailing, and travelling and are not as gross and rustic (unsophisticated) as our peasants of France. They are amenable (agreeable) enough when we flatter them and govern them with justice, but are by nature indocile (wild).

It is more and more necessary to establish respect due to authority especially amongst the people of the countryside .... One means of achieving this is to choose the officers of the administration for the countryside from amongst the inhabitants who are wise and capable of commanding, and to give all the attention possible to supporting their authority. It can be said that a lack of firmness by the government in the past has contributed to insubordination (defiance). For several years now crimes have been punished, disorders have been checked by suitable chastisements (punishments). Policing of public roads, cabarets, etc., have been better, and in general, the inhabitants have been controlled better than in the past.

- Gilles Hocquart

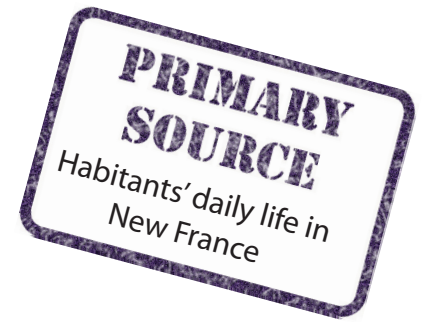
"Memoir to the minister containing a characterization of the French Canadian population," in Thorner, T, and Frohn-Nielsen, T. A Few Acres of Snow: Documents in Pre-Confederation Canadian History, pp. 66 (contributor Hoquart), © University of Toronto Press Higher Education Division, 2003.



# #6

## Instructions to Intendant Dupuy

Excerpt from a letter written by The Bishop of Québec to Claude-Thomas, who served as the Intendant of New France from 1726 to 1728.



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

Sir,

The Bishop of Québec is aware of the fact that the multiplication of taverns (pubs) in Canada is the cause of great disorders. Young men in the colony drink excessively at the entrance of the churches causing great scandal. In order to pay for their debauchery they steal from their parents. Finally, the success that the tavern keepers enjoy encourages others to take up the same business. It is to be feared that eagerness to reap the same profits will persuade several habitants to abandon agriculture.

(Signed)

The Bishop of Quebec

"Instructions to Intendant Dupuy, 1 May 1726," in Cornelius Jaenen and Cecilia Morgan (eds.), *Material memory: Documents in Pre-Confederation history* (Toronto, ON: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), p. 45.





#7

# The settlers of New France

Excerpt from a letter written by Jacques Duchesneau in 1697 to a government official in France.



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

To the Minister,

... Whenever the labourers apply themselves assiduously (diligently) to the land, they subsist (survive) not only more honestly but are without comparison happier than those who are called good peasants in France. But in the spirit of this country of taking life easily, and having much of the savage temperament (personality) which is unsteady, fickle (changeable), and opposed to hard work, seeing the liberty that is taken so boldly to run the woods, they debauch (ruin) themselves with the others and go to look for furs as a means of living without working. This causes the land to be left uncleared and beasts (livestock) not multiply as they should and no industries can be established here ....

(Signed)  
Jacques Duchesneau  
1697

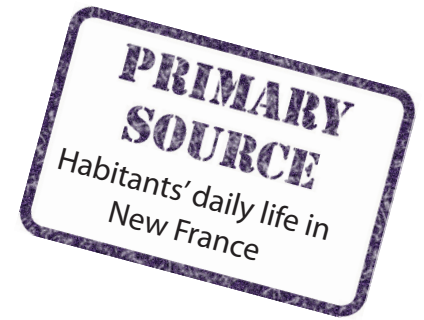
"To the minister," in Thorner, T, and Frohn-Nielsen, T.: A Few Acres of Snow: Documents in Pre-Confederation Canadian History, pp 56-57 (contributor Duchesneau), © University of Toronto Press Higher Education Division, 2003.



#8

## Safety in the new colony

Excerpt from a document written by Pierre Boucher, the governor of Trois Rivières, in 1664.



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

### Safety in the new colony

... Our enemies, the Iroquois keep us so closely pent up (restricted) that they hinder us from enjoying the advantages of the country. We cannot go to hunt or fish without danger of being killed or taken prisoners by those rascals; and we cannot even plough out fields, much less make hay, without continual risk: They lie in ambush on all sides, and any little thicket (bush) suffices (serves) for six or seven of those barbarians to put themselves under cover in, or more correctly speaking in an ambush, from which they throw themselves upon you suddenly when you are at your work, or going to it or coming from it. They never attack but when they are the strongest; if they are the weakest they do not say a word ....

Wives are always uneasy lest their husbands, who have gone away to their work in the morning, should be killed or taken prisoners and they should never see them again; and these Indians are the cause of the greater number of our settlers being poor, not only through our not being able to enjoy the advantages of the country as I have just said, but because they often kill cattle, sometimes hinder the gathering in of the harvest, and at other times burn and plunder houses when they can take people by surprise ....

- Pierre Boucher  
1664

"True and genuine description of New France commonly called Canada," in Thorner, T, and Frohn-Nielsen, T.: A Few Acres of Snow: Documents in Pre-Confederation Canadian History, pp 50-51 (contributor Boucher), © University of Toronto Press Higher Education Division, 2003.

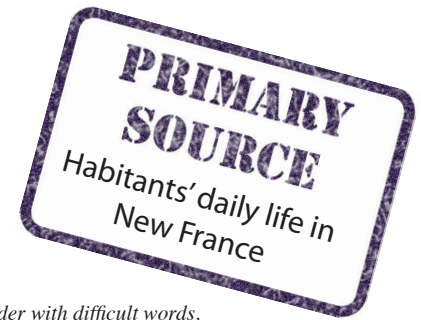




#9

# Advice for those coming to New France

Excerpt from a document written by Pierre Boucher, the governor of Trois Rivières, in 1664.



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

## Advice for those coming to New France

The people best fitted for this country are those who can work with their own hands in making clearings, putting up buildings and otherwise; for as men's wages are very high here, a man who does not take care and practice economy will be ruined; but the best way is always to begin by clearing land and making a good farm, and to attend to other things only after that has been done, and not to do like some whom I have seen, who paid out all their money for the erection of fine buildings which they had to sell afterwards for less than the cost. (...)

Most of our settlers are persons who came over in the capacity of servants, and who, after serving their masters for three years, set up for themselves .... If they are fairly hard working people you see them in four or five years in easy circumstances and well fitted out for persons of their conditions in life.

Poor people would be much better off here than they are in France, provided they are not lazy ... in one word, no people are wanted, either men or women, who cannot turn their hands to some work, unless they are very rich.

Women's work consists of household work and of feeding and caring for the cattle; for there are few female servants; so that wives are obliged to do their own housework; nevertheless those who have the means employ valets who do the work of maidservants ....

The land is very high in relation to the river, but quite level. The little of it that is under cultivation produces very good grain and vegetables but is not fit for fruit trees that do not grow in Clayey soil. There is eel fishing, but it is not plentiful. There are all types of wood, which are sold at Québec ....

-Pierre Boucher  
1664

"True and genuine description of New France commonly called Canada," in Thorner, T, and Frohn-Nielsen, T.: A Few Acres of Snow: Documents in Pre-Confederation Canadian History, pp 52-53 (contributor Boucher), © University of Toronto Press Higher Education Division, 2003.





#1

# Seigneurial dues

Drawing created by Charles William Jefferys (1869 to 1951), depicting habitants paying their yearly dues in money and produce to their seigneur.

**SECONDARY SOURCE**  
Habitants' daily life in New France



C.W. Jefferys in Morden H. Long, *A History of the Canadian People*, 1942  
Musée de la civilisation, Séminaire de Québec Library, M-142.



# #2

## Habitants and the church

Oil painting (Le Carême brisé or Broken Lent) created in 1848 by Cornelius Krieghoff. Lent is the 40-day period of the year, from Ash Wednesday to Easter, in which Christians prepare for the commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus by not consuming meat and alcohol, repenting their sins and giving charity.

**SECONDARY SOURCE**  
Habitants' daily life in New France



Le Carême brisé, 1848, Cornélius Krieghoff. Private Collection | Virtual Museum of Canada

#3

## The habitant's life

Excerpt from Canada: The story of our heritage, a Canadian history textbook for Grade 7 students, published in 2000.



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

The habitants' battle in life was, in many ways, as important as that of the soldiers and leaders of New France. The habitants played an essential role in creating a permanent, settled population along the St. Lawrence River. But it was not an easy life ....

The habitants had to clear the land, build a homestead, and plant and harvest a crop. The first task was never-ending, while the last one was annual. Building and repairing the house and barn were continual tasks. So were cutting and hauling firewood. The habitants had to be largely self-reliant in looking after all routine tasks such as cooking, baking, making furniture, and repairing tools. They had to attend to the educational and medical needs of the family. They had to endure the harsh physical climate and rough terrain, largely unaided by government support. The habitants had to pay taxes to the seigneurs and the church.

Usually families went to bed early, right after the evening meal. Families crowded into their small, two-room farmhouse. A wooden ladder led to one large room upstairs, where more than a dozen children might sleep. Heated only by a single fireplace, the children could huddle together in bed to keep one another warm.

Just as the daily schedule was dictated by nature, the habitants' work was related to seasonal cycles. After the habitants completed the initial task of constructing the family home and clearing the first tracts of land, they erected other buildings, such as a barn, shed, and a stable and dairy barn if the family became prosperous enough.

Habitants spent the wintertime cleaning and repairing tools and tending the animals. In spring they planted crops, took animals to pasture, and fixed fences. They ploughed the land with a team of oxen, then seeded it. They also cultivated a vegetable garden. In summer the entire family worked in the fields from sunrise until sunset. In late summer, they harvested grain crops and took them to the seigneur's mill for grinding. In the autumn, they put up preserves, chopped and stacked firewood, brought in animals, butchered and salted the meat, which they put into barrels, and prepared the soil for next season's crop. Their lives, both in the short run of days and in the long run of years, had a very natural rhythm.

Elsbeth Deir et al., Canada: The story of our heritage, Grade 7 (Whitby, ON: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2000), pp. 92, 97. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.



# #4

## Winter life for habitants

Excerpt from *Canada through time*, a Canadian history textbook, written by Angus L. Scully and published in 1992.



*Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.*

It was not all hard work on the seigneuries. Strange as it may seem, the long winters provided the habitants with time to enjoy their neighbours' company. They dressed in sturdy, comfortable clothes and had plenty of firewood to keep them warm. If a family wanted to visit someone, they travelled over the snow by sleigh to their neighbours' houses. People often took turns hosting parties for each other.

Habitant parties usually involved feasting from 7 p.m. until 11 p.m. on several kinds of meat, fish and vegetables. Drinks—from fizzy apple cider to beer made from spruce sap—flowed endlessly. Sometimes the seigneur treated everyone to red wine from France. Nobody cared if it was watered down, so long as they could all have some.

Angus L. Scully, *Canada through time*, book 1 (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1992), pp. 179–180.