

# 5

## The French in Canada, 1604–1759

Sara was confused. She had been watching a show on TV about the city of New Orleans. People kept talking about the “French Quarter.” Wasn’t New Orleans in the United States?

“Mom,” she asked, “if New Orleans is in the United States, how can it have a French Quarter? There aren’t any French people in the United States like there are in Canada, are there? They don’t even learn to speak French in school the way we do.”

“Yes, that does seem a bit confusing, doesn’t it?” her mom answered. “But years ago, France was trying to take over many parts of North America and South America. New Orleans is one place they settled. They called it ‘La Nouvelle-Orléans.’ Another name that might surprise you is ‘Ville d’étroit.’”

“Ville d’étroit,” Sara said. “Detroit?!”

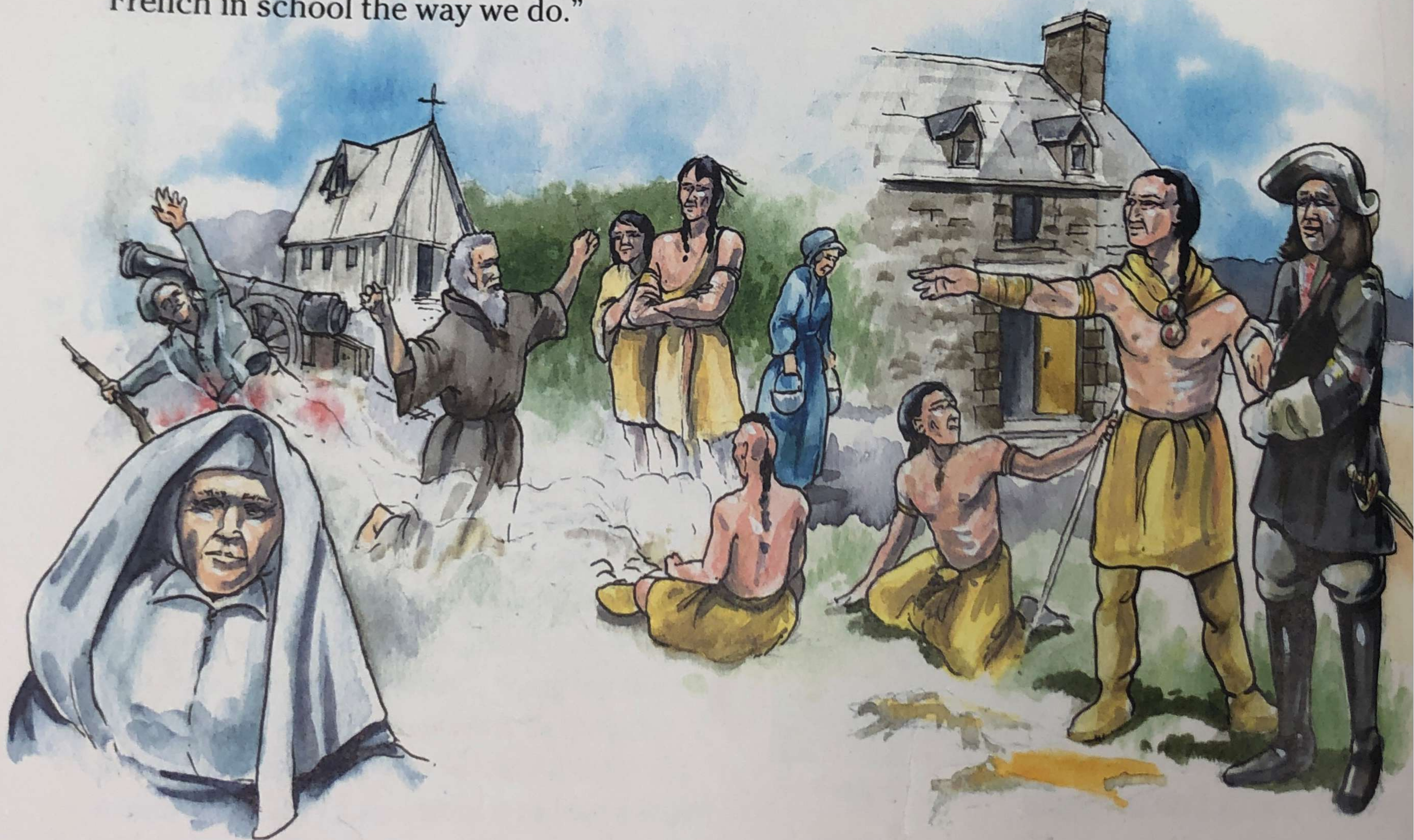


Figure 5.1 Daily life in New France



## What's in a name?

Remembering all the different place names in New France can be confusing! Some places had an Aboriginal name and a French name. In addition, the names of most places changed over time. Below are some of the places mentioned in this chapter that were important to the early explorers and settlers.

ABORIGINAL NAME	NAME IN NEW FRANCE ERA	NAME TODAY
Hochelaga	Mont Royal, Ville Marie	Montreal
Stadacona	Quebec	Quebec City

## As you read, think about

- why France decided to colonize North America
- what life was like for the early inhabitants of New France
- who was responsible for colonizing New France
- who lived and worked in New France
- how the Aboriginal peoples responded to the newcomers

"That's right. Can you guess the name of the Frenchman who founded Detroit?"

"Dunno. What was it?"

"His last name was Cadillac."

"You mean like the car? That doesn't even sound French to me."

Sara discovered that much of North America had, at one time, been under French rule. She also learned that the area claimed by France in North America was known as "New France." She was surprised to find out how many cities, towns, lakes, and rivers were renamed by the French.

By the early 1600s, France was ready to establish a colony in the area of North



Figure 5.2 NORTH AMERICA, 1700. This map shows the areas of North America claimed by European countries.

America visited by Jacques Cartier over 50 years earlier. In this chapter, you will learn more about the French presence in North America. You will also learn about the role France played in the colonies that would eventually become Canada.



## Early Settlements: Acadia

Samuel de Champlain explored and mapped territory all the way to Lake Superior, and he was determined to settle Quebec. He crossed the Atlantic Ocean about 20 times and never lost a sailor at sea. On land, his crew members were not as lucky, as you will find out.

Another European explorer was Pierre de Monts. Although Champlain is often called the “Father of New France,” de Monts was the one who hired Champlain in 1604 to join him on his first expedition to New France to establish the French settlement that would become known as Acadia.

### An interview with Pierre de Monts

*Imagine you are listening to the following interview with Pierre de Monts on the radio!*

*Interviewer:* You were given exclusive trading rights for furs in New France in 1604, were you not?

*de Monts:* Yes. I was given a 10-year monopoly on furs. In return, I was supposed to bring 60 colonists a year to New France.

*Interviewer:* Why did King Henry IV make this arrangement with you?

*de Monts:* It was an inexpensive way for the king to settle this new land. Instead of investing gold in a colony and paying for new colonists, he simply gave me the monopoly. Since I was expected to make money off the fur trade, it was my responsibility to pay for the colonists. However, things didn't work out the way they were supposed to. The Basques did not respect my monopoly. They obtained furs directly from the Aboriginal peoples instead of buying them from me. There was nothing I could do about it.

*Interviewer:* The colony itself, how was that?

*de Monts:* Samuel will tell you how difficult the winter of 1604–1605 was. Things got better when we moved to Port Royal, on the mainland, the next winter. It was milder for one thing. Also, Samuel and my lawyer, Marc Lescarbot, started a dinner club called “The Order of Good Cheer.” We all took turns providing the best meal we could for everyone else in the club. Many Mi'kmaq people joined us. Everyone ate well, and we entertained each other. Marc even wrote a play, which some of the men performed. Hardly anyone died.

*Interviewer:* And then the disappointment....

*de Monts:* The king cancelled my monopoly because I wasn't building up the colony quickly enough. In 1607, I returned to France. After that, my friend Chief Membertou looked after the settlement as if it were his own.

**Figure 5.3** Pierre de Monts travelled to North America only once. He founded Port Royal, the first French colony in North America.





## An interview with Samuel de Champlain

*Imagine you are listening to the following interview with Samuel de Champlain on the radio!*

*Interviewer:* Mr. Champlain, although you were a passenger on a ship that sailed to Hochelaga in the spring of 1603, you returned to France before winter set in. What can you tell us about your first winter in North America, in 1604?

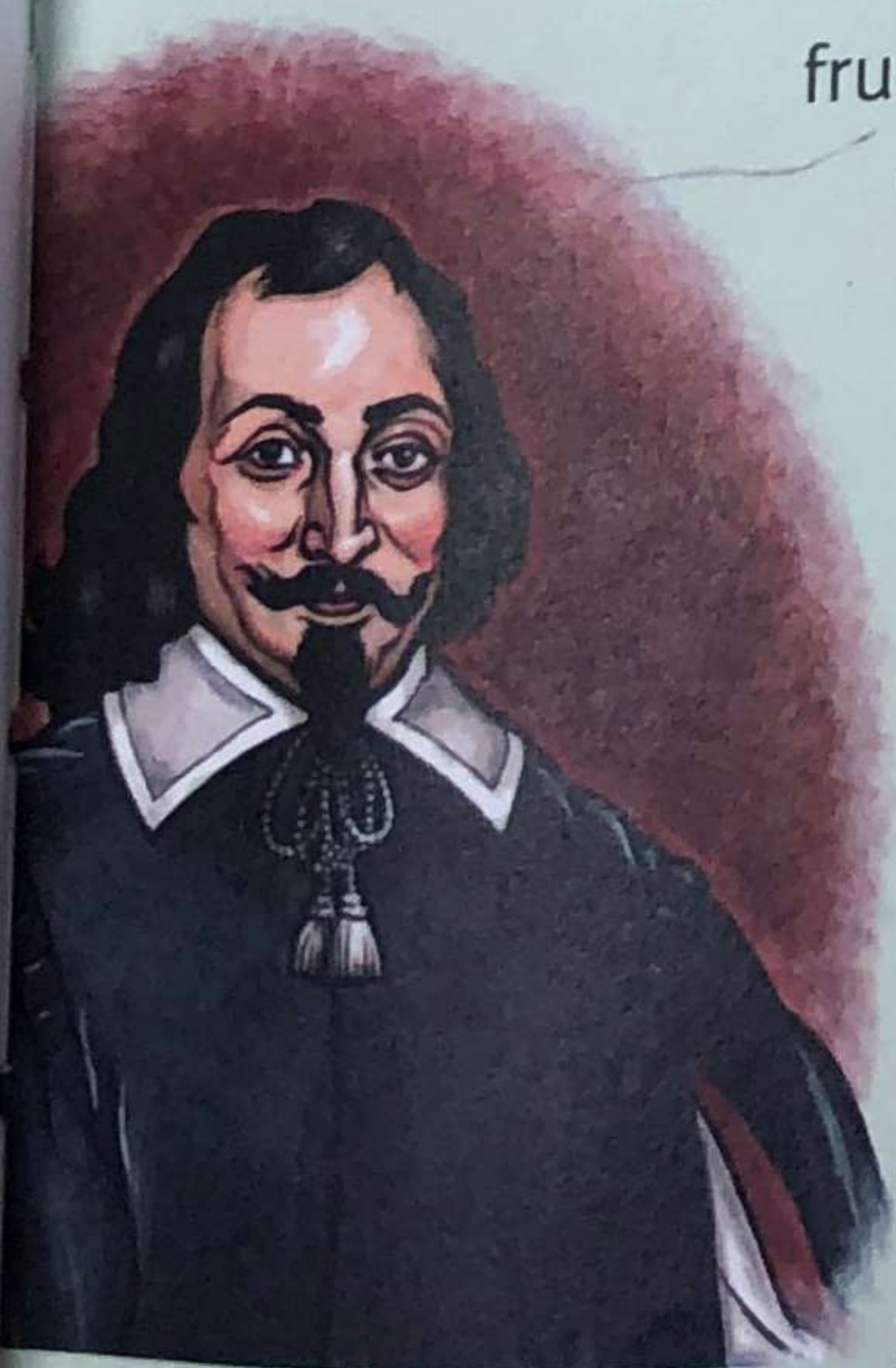
*Champlain:* Mostly, I remember the cold. As you know, we stayed in Acadia. Acadia is no farther north than France, so we thought winter would be the same. When snow started falling in October, we started to worry.

*Interviewer:* You set up camp on Île de St. Croix, did you not? Why did you choose to stay on an island?

*Champlain:* We felt that on an island we would be able to defend ourselves easily if we were attacked. Unfortunately, we had no idea that the ice would build up in the Baie Française to the point where, for long periods of time, we could not safely cross. It is so frustrating to see a moose that will feed your whole group

for several days come within firing distance, but because you are on the island and it is on the mainland, you have no

**Figure 5.4** This portrait of Champlain is based on written accounts of the explorer. Historians do not believe Champlain ever had a portrait painted of himself.



**Figure 5.5** Champlain drew this map of Port Royal.

way of getting to the animal. Then we ran out of firewood. Then the freshwater spring froze over.

*Interviewer:* It must have been a very difficult several months.

*Champlain:* It was. Of our 79 men, we lost 35 to scurvy, malnutrition, or the cold. Only two others and I stayed on in the New World after that winter. It became harder and harder to get people to come from France. All they heard about was how cold the winters are here.

*Interviewer:* Is there anything else you would like to add?

*Champlain:* I would like them to know that even though we have had some difficult times, I remain optimistic about the future here. The Mi'kmaq have helped us to overcome scurvy. I believe in the tremendous riches of this new land. Someone once said that even the moon shines brighter here. And that's true – this is a glorious land.

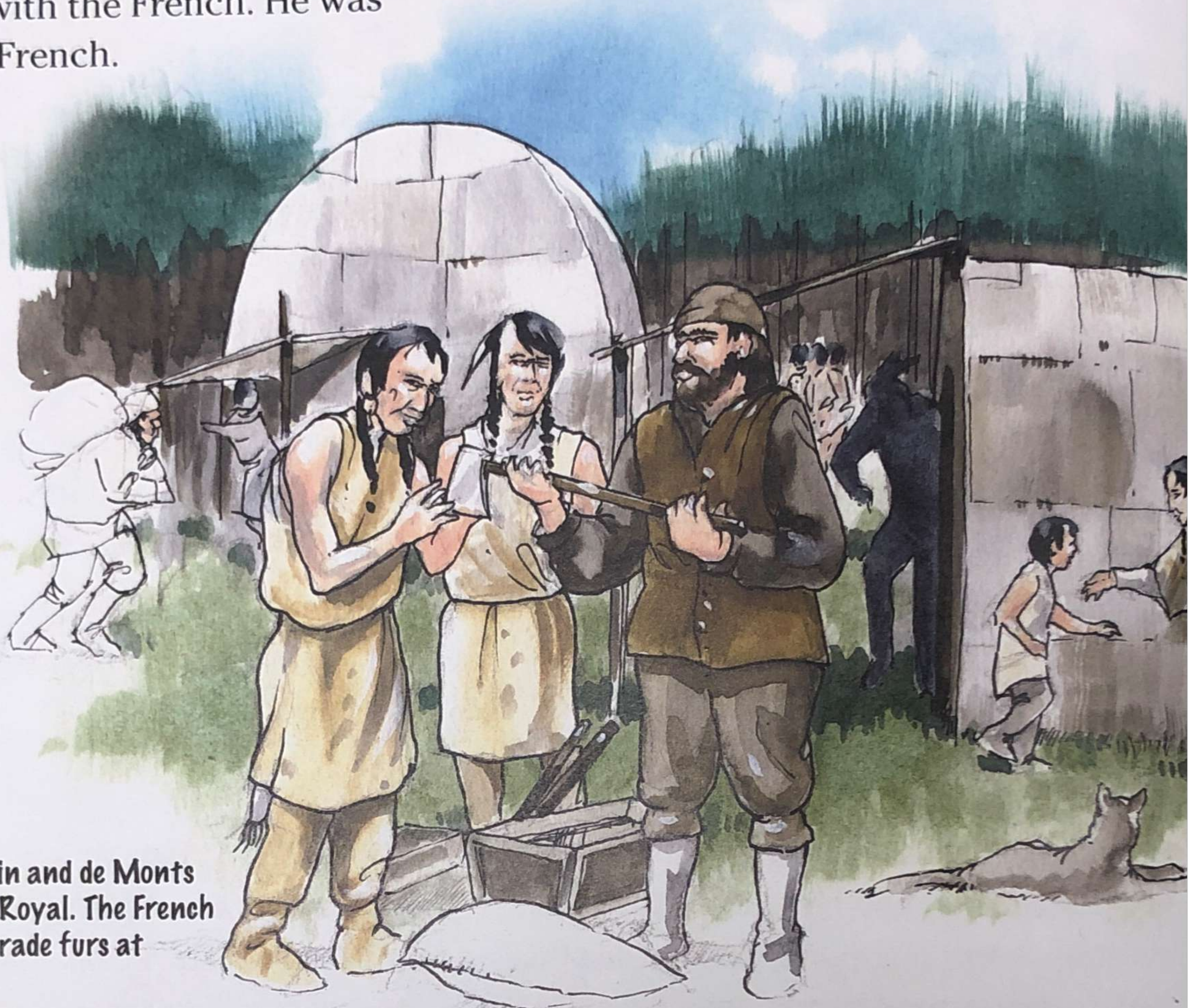


## Chief Membertou

Membertou was a Mi'kmaq chief who, during the early years of the Acadian settlements, worked and traded with the French. He was a good friend to the French.

Membertou looked after the settlement at Port Royal for three years (1607–1610). He even kept up the gardens. In 1610, Jean de Poutrincourt, one of the original colonists, returned to New France to help resettle the colony. In 1613, the British destroyed Port Royal, which

Membertou had carefully tended. The British attack set the stage for many years of fighting over who would control the colony, the French or the British.



**Figure 5.6** In 1605, Champlain and de Monts established a colony at Port Royal. The French and the Mi'kmaq began to trade furs at the settlement.

## Different points of view

The settlements in Acadia were the first European settlements in Canada. In the beginning, the Mi'kmaq people welcomed the French settlers. They traded with them and showed them how to live on the land. Soon, however, the Mi'kmaq people became concerned. They realized that their view about the land was different from the view of the French. To the Mi'kmaq, land was not owned, or possessed, by one person or group. Land was shared. The Mi'kmaq had rules about who could use the different territories to hunt and fish. These rules were decided by consensus. The Europeans did not want to follow these rules when they arrived in New France.

At one time, Europeans had recognized that land could not be claimed if people already lived

there. That all changed during the Renaissance. In 1493, the pope of the Roman Catholic Church said that inhabited lands could be claimed in the name of God. In 1763, the British passed the Royal Proclamation that gave the British the right to purchase land from Aboriginal peoples. No one ever thought to ask First Peoples what they thought about newcomers owning land that they had lived on for years.

When Aboriginal peoples allowed Europeans to use the land, they did not mean for the Europeans to own it and do whatever they wanted with it. The Europeans, however, believed the land was theirs to buy and sell, and that they could use it in whatever way they wanted. These two different ideas about possessing and using land became the root of many disagreements over the centuries.



# An interview with Chief Membertou

*Imagine you are listening to an interview with the Mi'kmaq chief Membertou on the radio!*

*Interviewer:* Chief Membertou, please tell us what you thought when the French first came to trade with you.

*Membertou:* I thought that we could make an **alliance**. We would supply the French with furs – all those Europeans are crazy for fur, even old robes! – and they would supply us with other trade goods, such as cloth and metal objects.

*Interviewer:* Why are you so interested in metal things?

*Membertou:* Cooking pots made from metal are much lighter to carry than our clay pots, and they don't break. The women also like the sewing needles, which go through the animal hides much easier than bone needles do. Until we began trading with the French, we made everything from clay, bone, stone, or wood. Men like metal arrowheads, spearheads, fishhooks, traps. Metal tools last longer, and we don't have to spend as much time carving, sharpening, and repairing the tools. This gives us more time to hunt and fish, and more time to pick berries and other wild plants. Some of our relatives farther inland farm. But here on the coast we have plenty of food, so farming is not necessary. The French are very fond of farming, however.

*Interviewer:* What has been your greatest challenge in dealing with the Europeans?

*Membertou:* There have been many, but the greatest challenge has been dealing with the diseases the Europeans have brought with them. Although some of our people were in contact with Europeans long before the arrival of Champlain and de Monts, we have never before lived in such close quarters with Europeans.

Now we are spending more time with the explorers – as river guides and as trading partners. None of our medicines seem to cure the new diseases. Often, our Elders are the first to get sick and die. We are losing their wisdom. Our children are also dying, so we are losing our future. It is terrible.

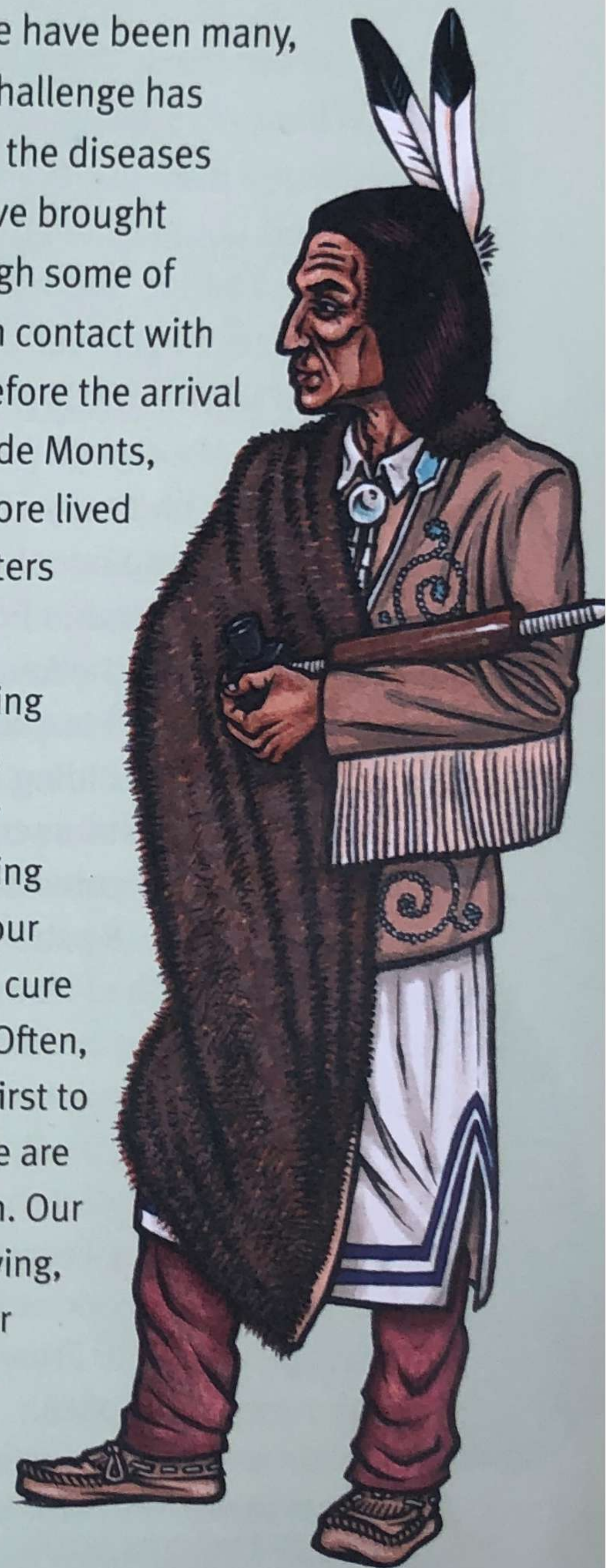


Figure 5.7 Chief Membertou was a good friend of the French.



## The Beginnings of Quebec

In 1608, Champlain returned to New France. There, he turned his attention to building his **l'Habitation** at Stadacona, which was farther inland than Port Royal. He called the settlement Quebec. The new village became the centre of the colony of New France. Whenever Champlain was in France, he encouraged immigration to New France. He convinced Louis Hébert and his wife to move to New France and farm. He asked Catholic priests to go over to look after the spiritual and social needs of the settlers and to convert the Aboriginal peoples. Still, in 1627, the colony had only 100 inhabitants.

In 1627, the Company of One Hundred Associates was created in France. Led by the powerful Cardinal Richelieu, the company was granted trading rights in return for building up the colony. That summer, a supply ship and 400 colonists set sail from France. By the time the ships reached New France, war with England had broken out, and the colonists were prevented from landing. The Kirke brothers, hired by the British to capture French land, blockaded Quebec and sent the ships back to France.

With no new supplies, Champlain and his men were facing starvation. In 1629, he was forced to surrender his beloved l'Habitation, and the Kirke brothers took him back to Europe. In 1632, after much

The former village of Lachine is now part of the city of Montreal. It got its name from the French word for "China"

(*la Chine*). Robert Cavelier de La Salle, who was exploring the interior of North America in search of a passageway to Asia, thought that the canal in the village would lead him to China.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

negotiation, Quebec was returned to France. Champlain returned to New France the following year. He died in Quebec in 1635. At that time, the colony had a population of 200 people. It would be up to others to fulfill Champlain's dream of a French settlement in North America.



**Figure 5.8** When Champlain arrived in Quebec, he built a wooden fort that he called "l'Habitation." It was surrounded by a tall wooden fence made of logs. The Aboriginal peoples came to the fort to trade furs for goods such as blankets, kettles, and tools.



# People of the Colony

Following Champlain's death in 1635, the French colony continued to grow, but slowly. Compared to the populations of the English and Dutch settlements farther south, the French colony was small. Stories about the cold winters and the threat of the Iroquois attacks convinced most would-be settlers to stay in France.

In 1642, the French founded a **missionary** colony for the Roman Catholic Church at Mont Royal and called it Ville Marie. However, attempts to convert Aboriginal peoples to Catholicism were not very successful.

## Governing New France

By 1665, New France was governed by a **sovereign council**. The council, **appointed** by the king and his representatives, was made up of three people: the governor, the intendant, and the bishop. The governor took care of military matters, such as dealing with the English and the Aboriginal peoples. The intendant looked after matters like business and industry within the colony. The bishop took care of health, education, and religion.

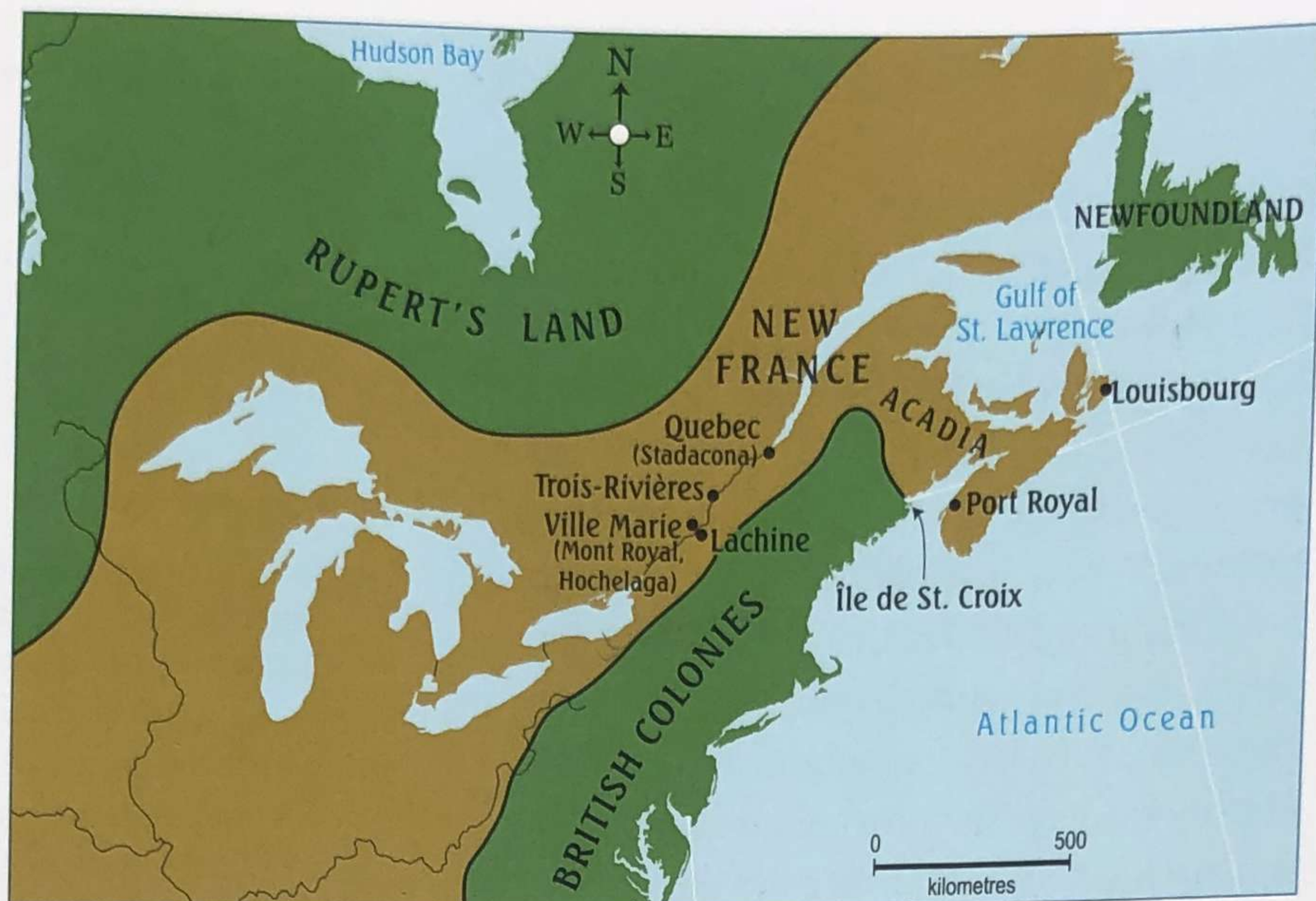
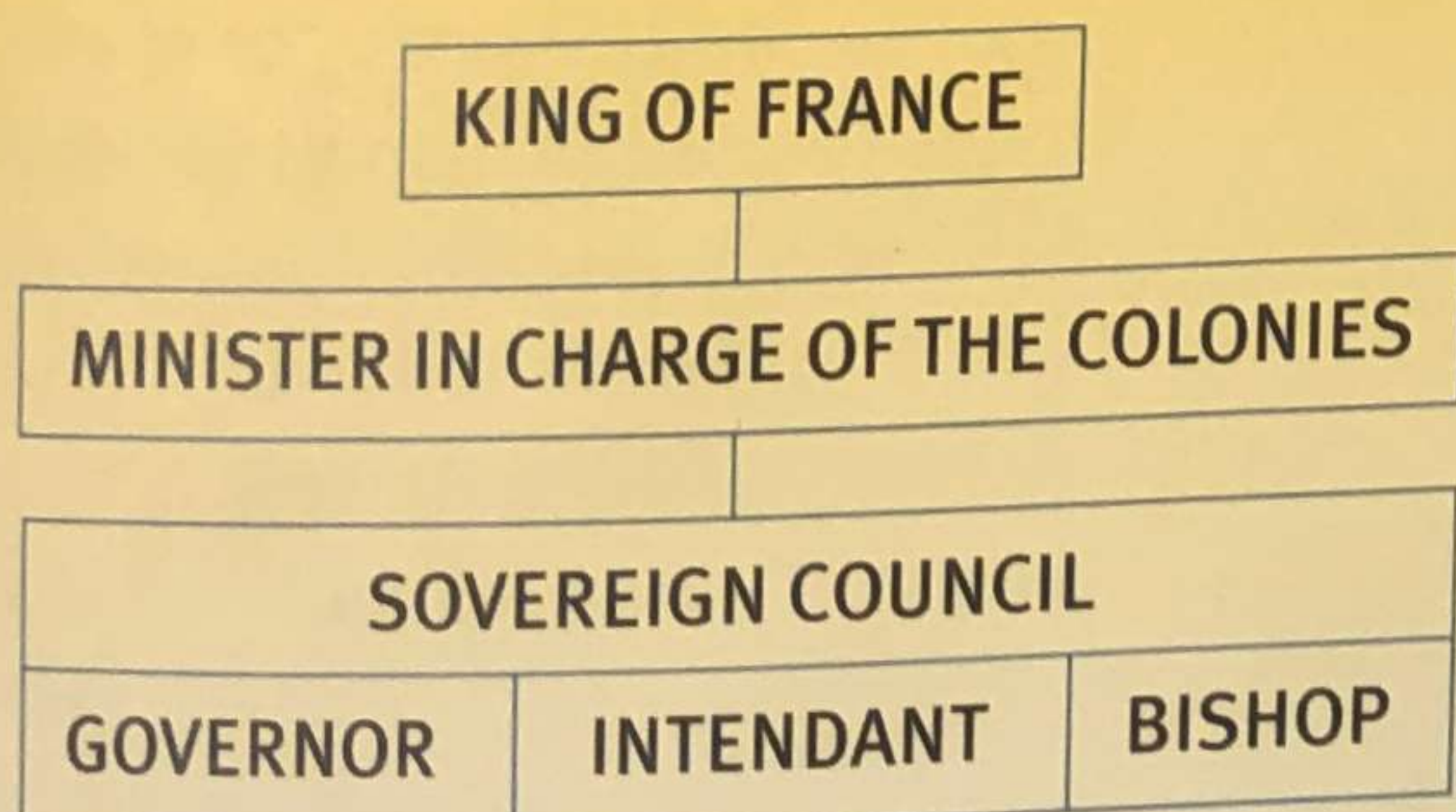


Figure 5.9 SETTLEMENT IN NEW FRANCE

In 1663, King Louis XIV cancelled the contract of the One Hundred Associates and put the French colony under direct royal control. He decided to send someone to run the colony as his own representative. This person was called an **intendant**. The first intendant of New France was Jean Talon. He arrived in 1665, and, during his years of rule, he helped the colony prosper. One of the first things Jean Talon did when he arrived in New France was take a **census**.



Figure 5.10 At census time, Jean Talon met with each family and discussed the settlers' needs and their goals for the future.



## The *filles du roi* (daughters of the king)

From the census, Jean Talon learned that there were twice as many men as women living in the colony. He realized that if New France was to grow, more women were needed. He persuaded the king to send the *filles du roi* (daughters of the king), who would marry settlers and produce many children for the colony.

Between 1665 and 1673, 900 of these young women came from France to New France. Some were orphans. Others were simply looking for new adventures and opportunities. Young, strong country girls seemed to fare best in New France – they were used to working hard, gardening, and caring for animals. They ranged in age from young teenagers to women in their twenties. Most were married within two weeks of their arrival in New France. Each woman was given a **dowry** by the king. A dowry was money or property given by a wife to her husband when they married. In New France, it consisted of clothing and household items.

## Jean Talon's 1666 census

The census of 1666 was the first one taken in North America. Talon wanted to know exactly how many settlers lived in the colony and find out what the people did for a living. He used the information from the census to develop his plans for the colony. Unfortunately, Talon's census only tells us part of the story, because he did not include Aboriginal peoples in the census.

From his census, this is what Talon found out: The colony had 3215 inhabitants of European descent: 2034 males and 1181 females. Their occupations included: 3 notaries, 3 schoolmasters, 3 locksmiths, 4 bailiffs, 5 surgeons, 5 bakers, 8 barrel makers, 9 millers, 18 merchants, 27 joiners, and 36 carpenters. Three major settlements were inhabited by 528 families. Quebec had a population of 2125 people, Montreal had 635, and Trois-Rivières had 455.

All people crossing the ocean faced many dangers. Shipwrecks were common, and ocean voyages could take anywhere from four weeks to several months, making it difficult to know how much food to bring for the crossing. For the *filles du roi*, however, the challenges were even greater. Sometimes ship captains stole the few

possessions the women brought with them. Once they arrived in New France, though, the leaders of the colony did their best to help out the young women.

Talon also used other methods to encourage population growth. Unmarried men were not granted fishing and fur-

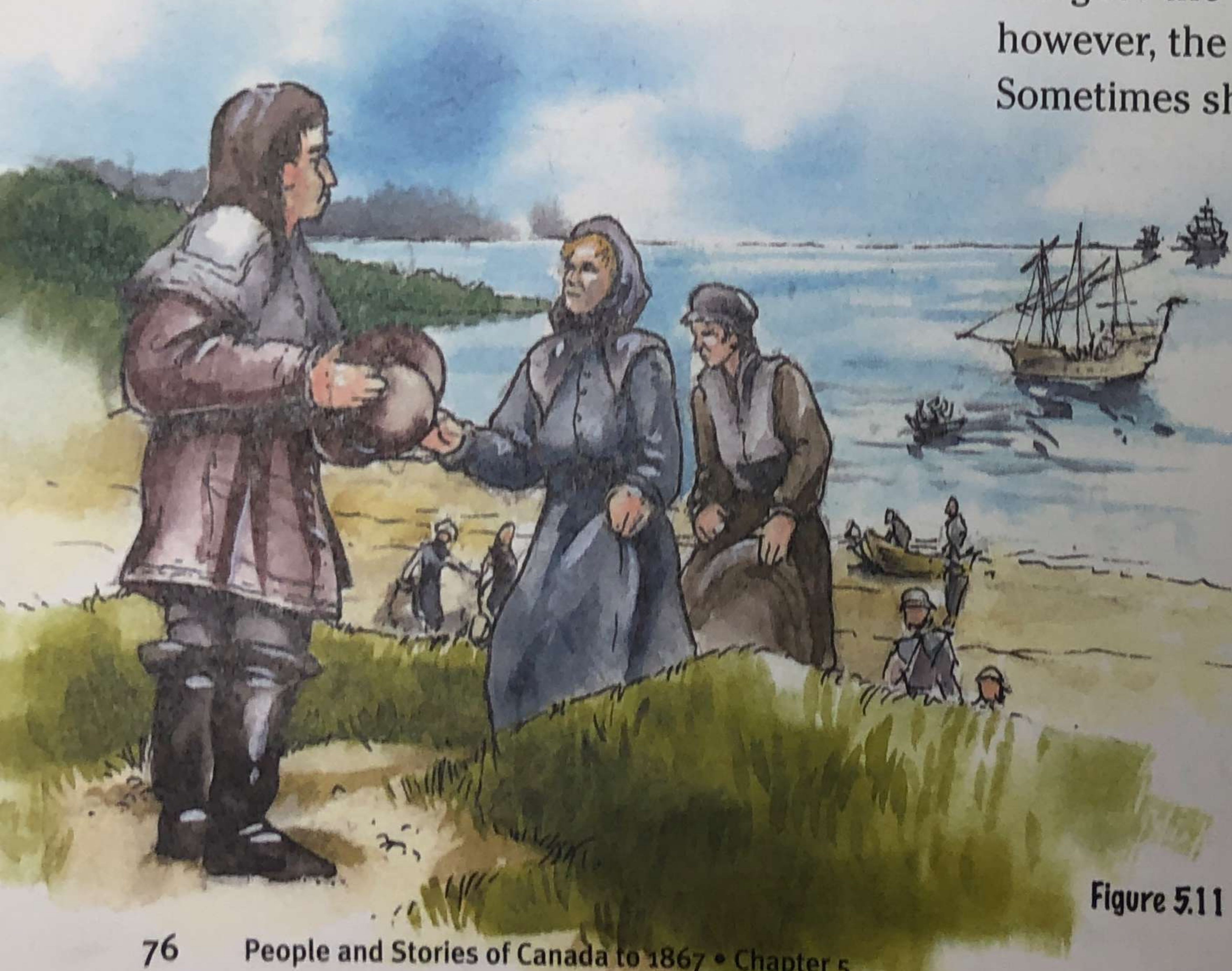


Figure 5.11 Filles du roi arrive in New France.



trading rights. If a father had a son or daughter who was old enough to be married but was not, the father had to provide a good reason why his son or daughter was still single. Talon offered families money for having children – the larger the family, the more money it was given. For these reasons, after 1673, the population of New France grew quickly. While Talon was intendant, the population of New France grew from 3200 to 7600 people. Talon himself never took advantage of his own programs; he did not marry or have children.

## Habitants

Jean Talon inherited the **seigneurial system** from previous leaders of the colony. Used as a means to divide the land, it was similar to the system used in France. Land was granted to **seigneurs**, or lords, who then rented the land to **habitants**. The seigneur was responsible for developing the land by building a mill or fort.

A habitant was responsible for cultivating the land. The land, which ran along both banks of the St. Lawrence River, was divided into long, thin strips so that each farm had access to the river. Jean Talon made sure to fill in vacant land and allot it, and, generally, brought organization to the plan.

Talon encouraged the habitants to grow a variety of crops. Before he arrived in New France, habitants had grown mostly wheat. Talon had them plant peas and beans, hemp and flax for cloth, and barley and hops for beer. Under his guidance, the habitants started exporting some of their surplus crops. Some habitants imported fruit trees from Europe. Many of the trees grew well in New France.



Figure 5.12 In New France, women usually wore separate tops and skirts (as seen here). The handwoven cloth came in stripes as well as plain or checkered patterns. Long-sleeved jackets helped to keep them warm. Men wore handspun breeches and short jackets. Hats were often similar to those worn in France, before the settlers started making hats that were warmer for the climate in New France.

Talon also increased the amount of livestock and other animals in the colony. In a very short time, the colonists were able to fulfill all of their own needs for meat and leather, eggs and milk, as well as wool.

Many habitants had their own horses, which they used for ploughing and for transportation. This bothered some of the newly arrived elite from Europe. They felt that the habitants were becoming too independent. In France, few farmers could afford a horse.



## The Church and Its Role in New France

During this time in history, the Catholic Church had great power. Church leaders influenced governments throughout Europe. The power of the church was lessened somewhat, however, in New France. Although the people of New France were required to build a church and a home for the priest, some priests thought that colonists did not show enough respect. Priests complained of “parishioners chatting in the pews, wandering outside for a smoke during the sermon, bringing their dogs along to Mass, generally making themselves too comfortable.”

It was very important to all the church leaders that those in their care learn to follow God from a Catholic, European **point of view**. These leaders believed that they were the only people who really understood what God wanted. As a result, they tried to make everyone believe exactly what they did. Some priests worked solely as missionaries among the Aboriginal peoples.

The two main **orders** of priests were the Récollets and the Jesuits. The priests, especially the Jesuits, travelled to the villages of different Aboriginal peoples, and learned their language and observed their ways. Once trust had been established, the Jesuits set about to convert them.

The missionaries were well educated. They often wrote about their travels in and observations of the country and the Aboriginal peoples whom they met there. Much of what historians know about New France comes from the writings of these priests.

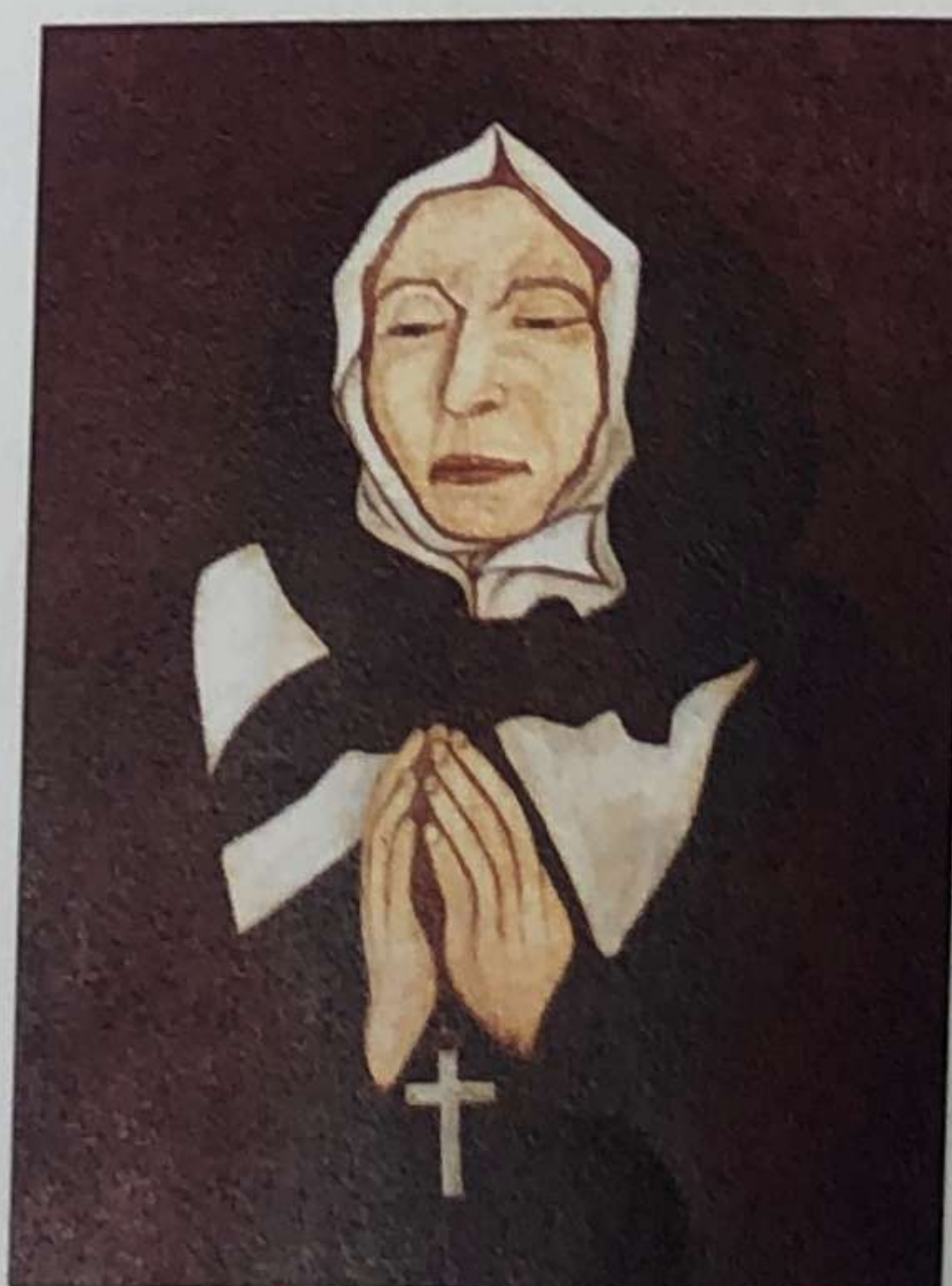


Figure 5.13 Arrival of Madame Champlain, at Quebec in 1620. Champlain's wife, Hélène Boullé was only 14 years old when she arrived in New France. She rarely saw her busy husband and became very lonely, except for the Wendat children she grew close to. After four years, she returned to France. She became an Ursuline nun following her husband's death in 1635.

The church was involved in many other areas of peoples' lives. Priests and nuns, for example, ran all of the schools and hospitals in New France.

### Schools

The Ursuline Nuns arrived in New France in 1639. They focused on educating young women and girls. They taught both



Aboriginal and French girls religion, as well as reading, writing, and needlework. Marie de l'Incarnation was a widow and the first Ursuline Nun to come to New France. She learned Algonquian and

Figure 5.14 This is an original portrait of Marguerite Bourgeoys painted immediately after her death on January 12, 1700. A second portrait of Marguerite was painted over this one. In 1963, art restorer Edward Korany found this original under many layers of paint.



Iroquoian languages, and wrote dictionaries of both languages.

When Marguerite Bourgeoys arrived in 1663, she began several schools for girls in Ville Marie. She taught religion, reading, writing, and "domestic arts" like sewing and needlepoint. Some girls in her care became nuns. She also took charge of the filles du roi when they arrived. She interviewed them and housed them until they were ready to be married. For many years, her order, Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal, was not officially recognized by the church, because she refused to become **cloistered**. Instead, she left her **convent** and travelled to where the people were. She is often referred to as "the mother of the colony."

Jesuit priests taught the boys religion, arithmetic, reading, writing, and a **trade**.

Some boys learned how to be carpenters. Others became sculptors. Some were trained to be navigators, others to be priests.

## Hospitals

Jeanne Mance was the first nurse in North America. She arrived in 1642, and she started the first hospital, called the Hôtel-Dieu, in Ville Marie.

Nuns grew fruits and vegetables and raised animals so that the patients could be fed. Nuns also did housekeeping chores at the hospital.

The nuns received money from the French government to look after soldiers and officers of the king. They also used the money to help the poor when they were sick, and any orphans who came into their care.

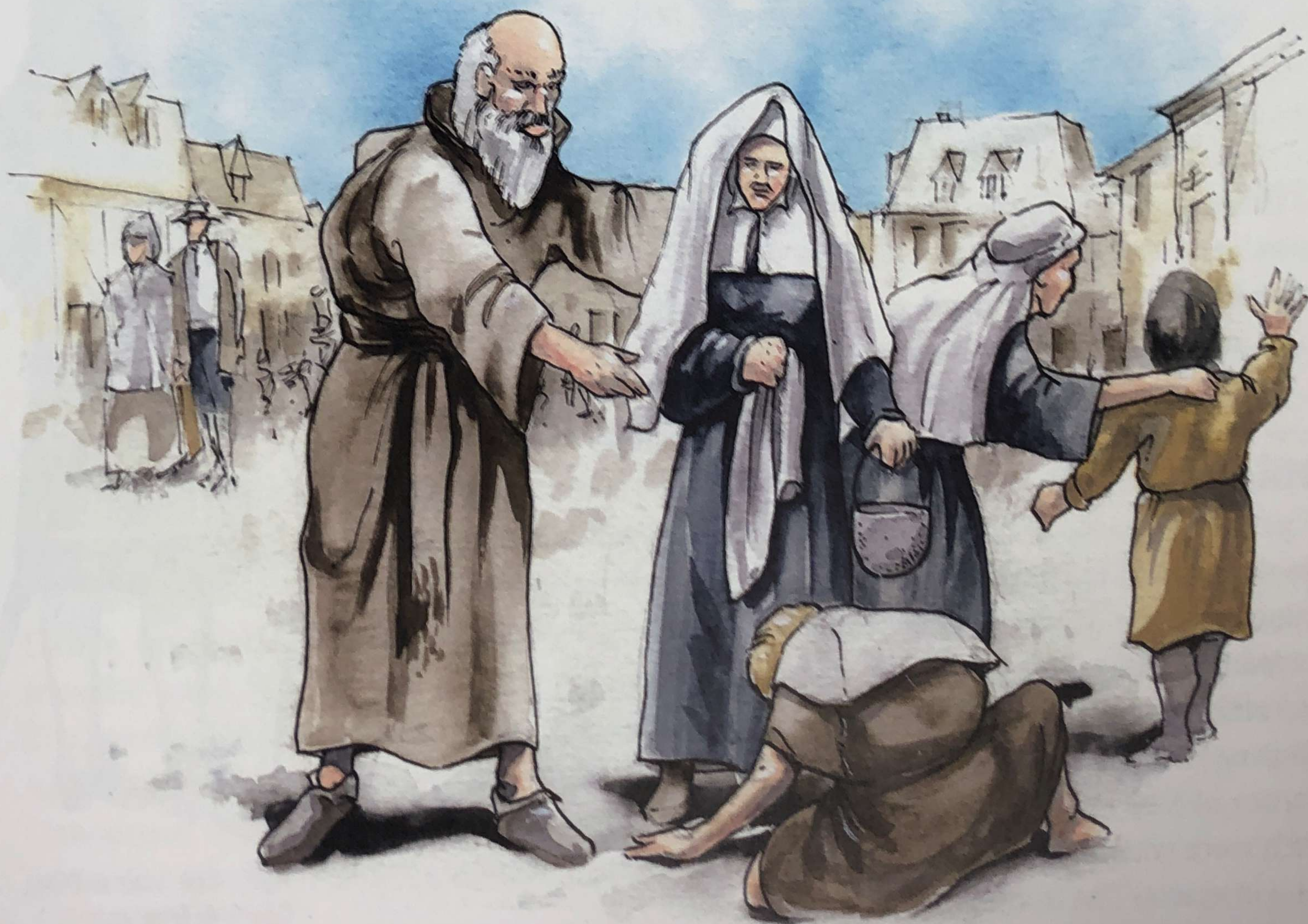


Figure 5.15 Nuns and priests in the colony taught children and tended to the sick.



# The Fur Trade

The intendant and other leaders wanted people to farm and settle the colony. Many habitants, however, were drawn to the money that could be made in the fur trade. While the church and the king wanted the Aboriginal peoples to live like the French, often it was the French fur traders who adapted to Aboriginal ways of life.

Many young men of the colony became *coureurs de bois*, or “runners of the woods.” You will read more about the French fur trade in chapter 7.

Though many nations imitate French customs, I observed, on the contrary, that the French in Canada in many respects follow the customs of the Indians, with whom they have constant relations. They use tobacco pipes, shoes, garters and belts of the Indians. They follow the Indian way of waging war; they mix the same things with tobacco; they make use of the Indian bark boats and row them in the Indian way... they have adopted many other Indian fashions.

—*Swedish botanist and writer Pehr Kalm, 1749*

## Frontenac

Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac, became governor of New France in 1672, after Jean Talon had left. Frontenac was vain, extravagant, and always in debt.

During Frontenac's second term as governor of New France (1689–1698), the French were constantly being harassed by the Iroquois. The Iroquois were being

supplied and encouraged by the English, so the French raided British and Iroquois territory to the south. This made the English angry. In 1689, the English raided Quebec with over 2300 men, hoping to take over the colony. When the British asked Frontenac to surrender, he replied: “Tell your leader that I shall reply to him through the mouths of my cannon.” The English, afflicted by smallpox and the onset of winter, had to withdraw.

Frontenac continued Talon's work of encouraging the growth of the colony, its agriculture, and economy. He worked to make peace with the Iroquois. He also built forts on the Great Lakes and along the Mississippi River. He built Fort Cataraqui on the eastern shores of Lake Ontario. From there, the explorer La Salle used it as a base from which to explore and trade fur. The fort was later named Fort Frontenac.

King Louis XIV of France was not happy with Frontenac. He thought he was too ambitious. He wanted Frontenac to protect New France, not find new lands. Although Frontenac made money from the fur trade he helped to build up, he also expanded French territory and influence in North America.



Figure 5.16 Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac



## Louisbourg

In the early 1700s, Acadia changed between French and English rule many times. When Britain gained control of Newfoundland and Acadia in 1713, France wanted to guard its lands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It started to build the Fortress of Louisbourg on Île Royale, present-day Cape Breton Island.

It took 25 years to build the great stone walls of the fortress surrounding Louisbourg, the new capital of Île Royale. Louisbourg became a busy centre for the French colony. Its main industry was the cod fishery. Fishermen caught and dried their net loads of cod. The colony's merchants traded the fish in Europe and the Caribbean. The harbour bustled with merchant ships.

Between 1713 and 1758, several thousand people lived in Louisbourg. With soldiers protecting the town, government officials lived in beautiful homes, furnished with finery from France. In 1758, Louisbourg was attacked and destroyed by the British.

In 1961, the government of Canada decided to reconstruct much of the Fortress of Louisbourg. That way, visitors could experience what it was like to live there in the 18th century. Louisbourg is the largest historical reconstruction in the country.

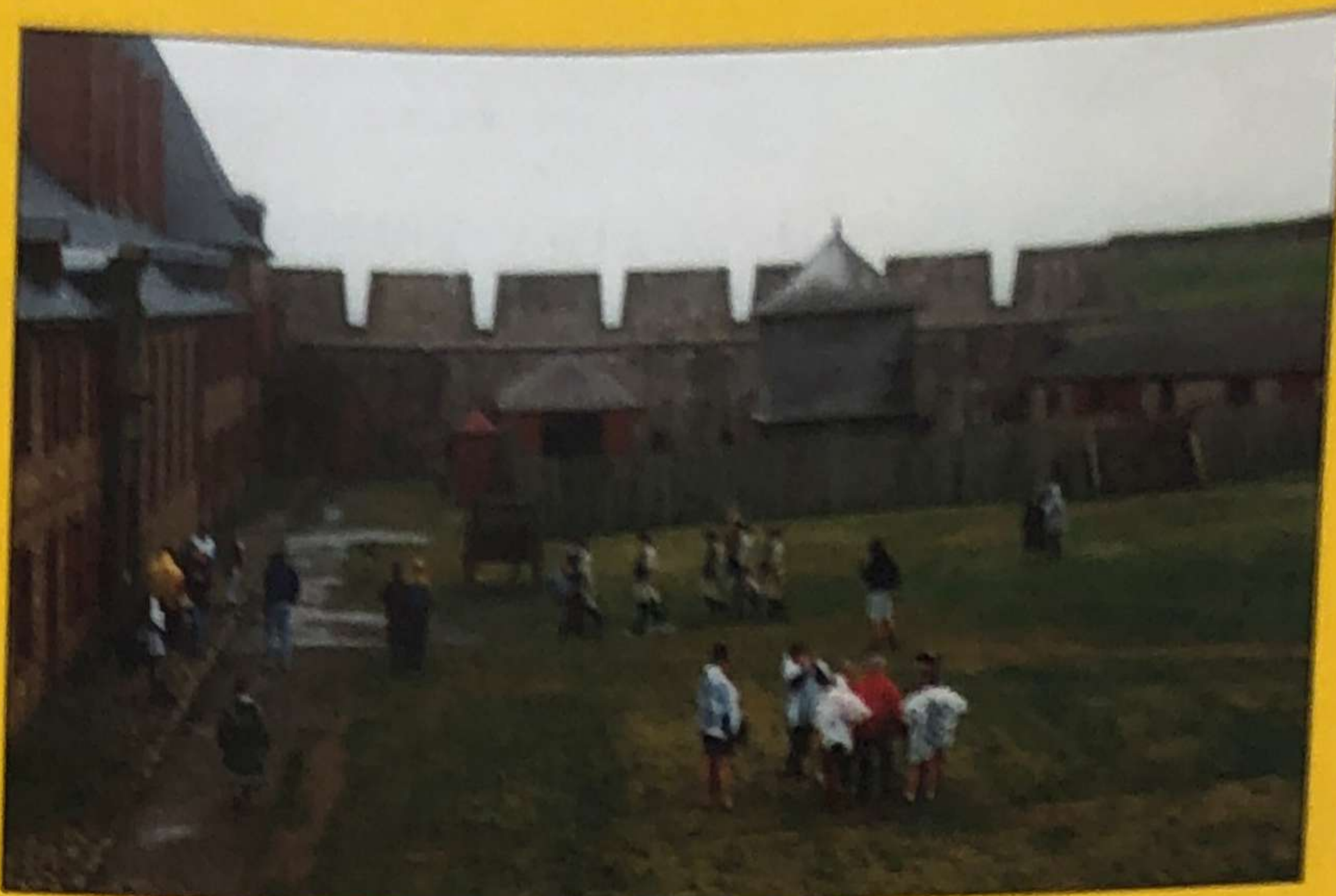


Figure 5.17 Modern-day visitors at Louisbourg



Figure 5.18 The reconstructed fortress of Louisbourg is a national historic site.

## Conclusion

Many French people settled on farms in present-day Canada in the early days of European expansion into North America. Others, especially the *couriers de bois*, travelled great distances in search of furs. The Jesuits ventured into unknown territory looking for Aboriginal peoples to convert to Catholicism. All contributed to the French presence in North America.

Although France lost its colonies to Britain from time to time, New France was always returned to the French. By the late 1600s, however, even Frontenac's daring defiance only helped to hold off the powerful English for a while longer.

In the next chapter, join Ben and Sara as they explore some reasons why France would eventually lose its North American colonies to the British.