



The French in North America

Read Aloud

They first arrived on fishing ships. Yet they soon “threw up their old [jobs] . . . for bear skins and beaver skins,” wrote historian Francis Parkman. They “followed the Indians . . . , lived with them, [and] grew familiar with their language. . . .” Who were these Europeans who chose to live in the forests of North America?

THE BIG PICTURE

As you read in the Infographic on pages 176–177, French explorers such as Jacques Cartier (kahr TYAY) first came to North America in search of a Northwest Passage to Asia. Then in 1534 the French reached what is now Newfoundland and claimed the land along the **St. Lawrence River**. They called it **Canada**, after the Huron word *kanata*, which means “village.” Later France’s land along the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes was named **New France**.

For over 60 years, few French people settled in New France. The French were fighting religious wars in Europe between Catholics and Protestants. But some French began fishing off the coast of New France. They also began a fur trade with the Native Americans that would soon bring wealth and power to France.

Focus Activity

READ TO LEARN

Why did France build colonies in North America?

VOCABULARY

- portage
- voyageur
- coureur de bois

PEOPLE

- Samuel de Champlain
- Jacques Marquette
- Louis Jolliet
- Robert La Salle
- Jean Baptiste Point du Sable

PLACES

- St. Lawrence River
- Canada
- New France
- Quebec
- Louisiana
- St. Louis
- Detroit
- Chicago



THE FRENCH COLONIES

Furs were in great demand in France. New France’s forests were filled with animals. In the early 1600s France began a colony there to help their fur-trading business. A colony would also help their search for a Northwest Passage, which you read about in Chapter 7.

In 1608 a French geographer and explorer, **Samuel de Champlain** (duh sham PLAYN), set up a trading post on the St. Lawrence River, called **Quebec** (kwih BEK). It was the first permanent French settlement in North America.

The Huron and the French

France’s fur trade depended on its Native American trading partners. So Champlain befriended the Huron near Quebec. He learned their language and customs.

The French sent missionaries to New France. But usually they did not force the Native Americans to

work or live in missions. Instead, the missionaries lived in Huron villages in order to convert them.

In 1609 the Huron offered to supply Champlain with furs if he helped them defeat their rivals in the fur trade, the Iroquois. The French did so. In return, the Huron helped the French increase their fur-trading business and remained their friends for many years. But the Iroquois never forgot their defeat by the Huron and the French.

Champlain (above) is called “the Father of New France.” The Huron tray (below) was stitched with moosehair.



NEW FRANCE

France tried to encourage settlement in New France during the 1600s. But French colonists were not allowed to own land, and farming in Canada's cold climate was hard. In addition, only Catholics were allowed to settle in New France. As a result, the French who came were fur traders and missionaries. By 1660 fewer than 3,000 French colonists were living in Canada.

Marquette and Jolliet

Champlain made many explorations into Canada, but he failed to find a Northwest Passage. Other French explorers had also tried. One explorer was **Jacques Marquette**

(ZHAHK mahr KET). As a missionary in what is today the state of Michigan, Marquette heard Native Americans tell of a mighty river to the west. Could this river turn out to be the Northwest Passage?

In 1673 Marquette and **Louis Jolliet** (LOO ee JOH LEE et), a former fur trader, set out to find the river Marquette had heard about—the Mississippi River. You can trace their route on the map below. But when they reached the Arkansas River, they saw that the Mississippi flowed south. Since the river did not flow west toward the Pacific Ocean, Marquette and Jolliet saw that it could not be a Northwest Passage. They returned to Lake Michigan.

FRENCH LANDS IN NORTH AMERICA, 1750



MAP WORK

In 1750 most of North America was claimed by Spain, Great Britain, and France. Some of the disputed areas were claimed by more than one country or by Native American peoples.

1. Which major waterways did France control?
2. Where was New France located?
3. Which settlements did La Salle's route cross?



Because of its easy access to the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes, Chicago (left and below), founded by Du Sable, grew to become a major transportation center.



Robert La Salle

Robert La Salle (lah SAHL), a French explorer, learned of Marquette and Jolliet's journey. In 1682 he set out to find the mouth of the Mississippi River. Near the Arkansas River, La Salle met the Quapaw (KWAH pah), who helped him reach the Gulf of Mexico. La Salle claimed the Mississippi River valley for France, naming it **Louisiana** after King Louis XIV of France. Find Louisiana on the map on page 266.

Settlements in New France

In the late 1600s and early 1700s, the French built forts, missions, and other settlements in New France. Some became major cities.

In 1700 French priests built a mission beside the Mississippi River in what is today Missouri. A trading post was soon added. It became the city of **St. Louis**. In 1701 the French built a trading post by the Detroit River. It became the city of **Detroit**.

On their return trip, Marquette and Jolliet used a **portage** connecting the Mississippi River to the Great Lakes. A portage is a land route from one body of water to another. **Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable** (ZHAHN bap TEEST PWAN doo SAH bluh), a Haitian fur trader, built a trading post along this portage in the 1700s. He befriended the Potawatomi who lived around the Great Lakes. Du Sable's trading post became the city of **Chicago**.



THE FUR TRADE

The fur trade was important to New France. In Europe's overhunted forests, fur-skinned animals were rare. Beaver hats had become popular. Many trappers and traders came to make money from furs.

Trading Posts

By the early 1700s there were many trading posts in New France. Trappers lived in the forests and came to the trading posts to sell or trade furs. Fur traders bought furs from French and Native American trappers. Then **voyageurs** (vwah yah ZHURZ), people who carried goods by canoe, brought the furs to Quebec. The furs were then shipped to France.



The furs traded by the **voyageurs** (above) were made into hats like this one worn by Franklin (left).

The Coureurs de Bois

France gave only a few people the right to trap and trade in its American colonies. So many trappers became **coureurs de bois** (KUR rer duh BWAH), which means "woods runners" in French. They trapped furs without permission from the French government. Many did this to earn a living. Many French trappers learned their trade from the Huron, Chippewa, and Ottawa peoples. They taught the trappers to use fast, light canoes. They taught them how to stay alive in the forests.

Many voyageurs and coureurs de bois came looking for adventure. One voyageur said:

There is no life so happy as a voyageur's life . . . so independent; no place where a man enjoys so much variety and freedom.

WHY IT MATTERS

The French settlements in New France surrounded English lands in North America. So the 13 English colonies had no way to expand. By the middle of the 1700s, the French had made friends with many Native Americans. The voyageurs and coureurs de bois helped with this. In the next lesson you will see how the French, the English, and the Native Americans fought to control much of North America.

Reviewing Facts and Ideas

SUM IT UP

- Samuel de Champlain built the first permanent French settlement in North America in 1608. It was called Quebec.
- Explorations by Marquette and Jolliet in 1673, and by La Salle in 1682, led to French control of the entire Mississippi River valley.
- By the early 1700s, France had a vast network of forts and trading posts throughout North America.
- The fur trade became a source of wealth for the French, who developed good relations with their Native American trading partners.

Links to LANGUAGE ARTS

Parlez-vous français?

Parlez-vous français? (PAHR lay VOO frahn SAY) means "Do you speak French?" You may know more French words than you think. As you learned in Chapter 4, the Iroquois call themselves the **Hodеносаunee**. The French called them the Iroquois, and that name stuck. The Wyandot are also generally known by their French name—Huron. Until recently, most people called the Lakota by their French name—the Sioux.



Other French words are now part of the English language. Among them are **glacier**, **plateau**, **lacrosse**, and **prairie**.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Who were some of the French explorers who came to North America? Why did they come?
- How did Native Americans such as the Huron help the French?
- FOCUS** How did the fur trade shape the growth of New France?
- THINKING SKILL** Compare the French and English colonies.
- GEOGRAPHY** Look at the map of New France on page 266. Plot a route that a voyageur might have taken from St. Louis to Quebec. Then list the trading posts where a fur trapper might have stopped.