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CANADA  
UNDER  
LOUIS XIV  
1663-1701

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*The Canadian Centenary Series*



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officials, administer justice, legislate, declare war on the King's enemies, and make treaties in the King's name. A monopoly of all trade with the colonies was granted for forty years, with the exception of the Newfoundland fisheries, where a monopoly would have been inimical to the training of the maximum number of sailors as well as being impossible to maintain. What was perhaps even more significant, the government offered subsidies to encourage trade with and among the colonies.

A scheme as ambitious as this required vast amounts of capital, and Colbert intended that it should be provided by private citizens, both French and foreign, rather than by the Crown. Foreigners who subscribed twenty thousand *livres* acquired the rights of French nationals for as long as that credit remained on the company's books, and after twenty years these rights of nationality became irrevocable. The main inducement to subscribe was, of course, the hope of profits, but very few men with money, either French or foreign, saw any such hope. Colbert's cousin, Colbert de Terron, the intendant at the Atlantic naval base Rochefort, held out little hope for the company's success. In February 1664 he informed Colbert that he would comply with the Minister's instructions and try to induce the merchants of La Rochelle to invest in it, but he was not sanguine as to the results because, as he put it, "our merchants lack the necessary vigour to engage in a business they know little about, moreover they can be cured only with great difficulty of the fear they have for the Dutch."<sup>11</sup> Colbert de Terron was himself willing to invest only ten thousand *livres* in the company, and he clearly did this with considerable reluctance. In the end, the Crown had to provide nearly 60 per cent of the capital raised, and nearly all the remainder was provided by the farmers of the revenue,\* tax collectors, officials, and other persons who were dependent on Colbert and who therefore had to do his bidding. When, in 1669, a dividend was declared to attract new subscribers it had to be paid out of the royal exchequer. Thus, the *Compagnie de l'Occident* was really a Crown corporation created by Colbert, maintained out of the royal treasury, and governed and directed by Colbert.<sup>12</sup>

So ended the first two years of royal government in Canada. It did not appear on the surface that much had been accomplished; respect for the new administration had certainly not been engendered by the squabbles at Quebec; the Iroquois were still inflicting casualties on the settlers at Montreal, and the economic foundations of the colony remained very

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\* Under the old régime in France, the right to collect the indirect taxes for specified

periods, or "bails," was leased (that is, "farmed") for fixed sums to syndicates of financiers, known as "tax farmers."

was largely in the hands of the Dutch, and the administration of some of the islands had become so corrupt that the planters were abandoning their estates. Colbert immediately decided to send, as an emergency measure, "a man of ability and of authority" with adequate forces to visit all the French possessions in America, restore order, establish a sound administration, and enable the residents to conduct their commercial affairs in freedom and security.

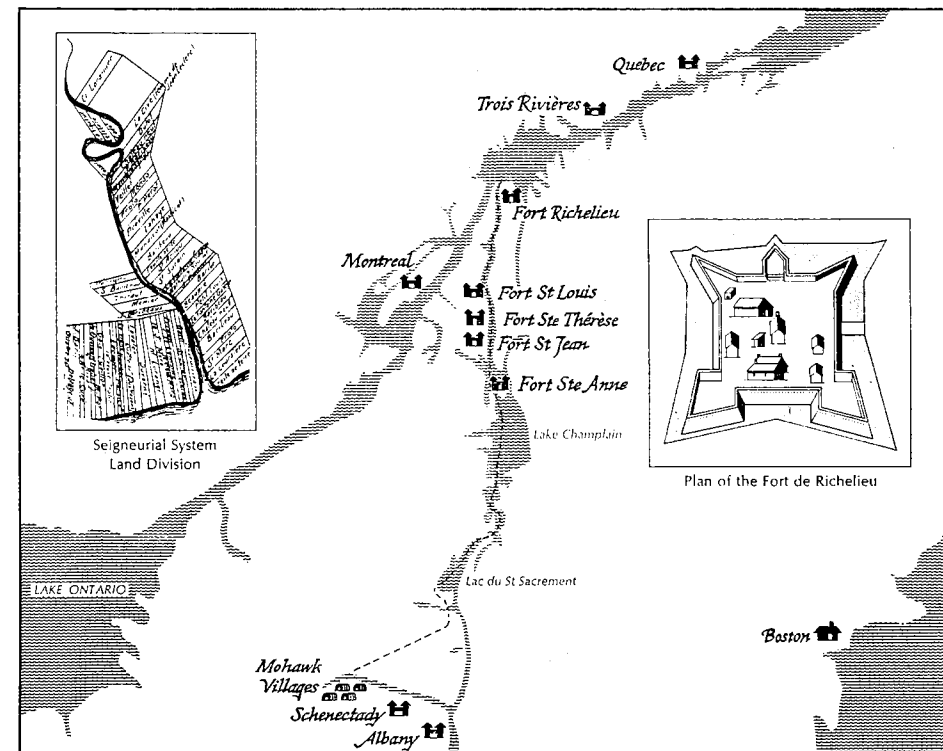
The man he chose for this task was Alexander Frouville, Seigneur de Tracy. Sixty years of age, Tracy had served as *Commissaire Général* with the French army in Germany during the Thirty Years' War, and during the Fronde he had remained staunchly loyal to the Crown—that is, to Mazarin. Promoted Lieutenant-General in 1651, he had maintained an army in the field when funds were lacking and all was chaos, holding the vital Garonne valley against the Frondeurs and their Spanish allies. He was a man of exceptional integrity, a very conscientious administrator held in great respect by all, not least by Colbert. His commission, dated November 19, 1663, appointed him "Lieutenant-General in all the lands of our obedience situated in North and South America and in the islands of America." He was, in fact, a viceroy, given supreme command of all French forces in America on land and sea, and also, supreme judicial power. His task was to administer an oath of allegiance to all French officials and subjects, "to establish the power of the King" and "to make all the people obedient unto him." On February 26, 1664, he set sail from France for the West Indies, to establish a new régime in the islands and then proceed to Quebec to perform the same task there.

While Tracy was engaged in this preliminary but vital task, in France Colbert was bringing his carefully worked out plans for colonial development to fruition. He had made a close study of the activities and methods of the great Dutch and English trading companies, which were reaping large profits for their shareholders. He decided to emulate them in an attempt to do in a few short years what the Dutch and English had taken over a century to do, not to mention also drastic social, religious, and political upheavals. Ignoring, or unaware, of the fact that the commercial systems of these powers were unsuited to the French social and economic framework, he set about establishing a French commercial company to exploit the resources of the French colonies and compete with the powerful Dutch and English companies. In May 1664 the letters patent creating the *Compagnie de l'Occident* were issued.<sup>10</sup> All property rights in the French possessions in North and South America, and also the west coast of Africa, were vested in the company. It now became the suzerain *grand seigneur* in Canada, Acadia, and Newfoundland, empowered to grant lands in fee, to build forts, levy troops, appoint all

be given safe conduct. After the Iroquois chiefs had arrived, and while peace terms were being discussed, a war party killed seven French, including four officers, who had gone hunting. Tracy regarded this as rank treachery, taxed the Albany authorities with being a partner to it, and declared the peace negotiations to be at an end. On July 24 two hundred French troops and ninety allied Indians, commanded by the Sieur de Sorel, were sent to attack the Iroquois. When they were some fifty miles from the Mohawk villages an Iroquois embassy met them; they were on their way to Quebec to make amends for the breach of the truce and had with them some French prisoners whom they were returning as a display of their good faith. The expedition then turned back and the peace negotiations were resumed at Quebec.

While these negotiations were underway the first ships of the year reached Quebec with the dispatches from the Court. When it was learned that France, allied with the United Provinces, was at war with England, the entire military situation appeared in a new light. Talon was firmly of the opinion that no peace treaty should be negotiated with the Iroquois until after they had been crushed in a full-scale campaign. He pointed out that twelve hundred regular troops, munitions, and supplies had been sent from France at great expense for this express purpose; moreover, past events had shown all too clearly that no trust could be placed in any assurance the Iroquois might give or treaty they might sign. No better time than the present, he argued, would be found for a campaign, since the Mohawks, relying on the recent peace negotiations, would not be on their guard, and once the Mohawks were crushed the way would be open to attack Albany. There was also good cause to hope that the Dutch residents of New York would welcome the French as liberators from English rule, and this would remove the danger of an English assault on Canada.<sup>3</sup> These arguments were more than adequate to convince Tracy and Courcelle. Talon immediately set to work organizing transport and supplies. By September 14 one thousand regular troops and four hundred *habitants* were mobilized, ready for the campaign.

In the English colonies, too, there was some debate as to what action to take now that England and France were at war. Early in July Governor Richard Nicolls of New York had received premature reports that seven hundred French troops were marching towards Albany. He immediately appealed to the authorities in New England to join their forces with his, destroy this French army, and then go on to conquer Canada; but he received no satisfaction whatever, owing to the involved alliances of these colonies with the neighbouring Indian tribes. New York derived considerable commercial benefits from the trade in furs with the Iroquois, and hence had no desire to see them crushed by the French. New England, however,



1 : From a contemporary map for Tracy's campaign, 1666.

and more particularly Connecticut, had to maintain good relations with the Mohicans on their borders, and this nation was the ancient and bitter foe of the Iroquois; thus the authorities in New England had no desire to aid the Mohawks, and they had a hard time persuading the Mohicans not to join with the French in the campaign against their old foes. It was also argued that the terrain between New England and New France was "an uninhabited mountaineous wilderness" where roamed a "multitude of barbarous heathen that may be feared to be treacherous." It was also claimed that it was too late in the season, and New England therefore excused itself from making any move to aid New York against the French.<sup>4</sup> This was not to be the last occasion when disunity in the English colonies would render Canada immune from attack.

On September 28 the French forces, led by Tracy and Courcelle, accompanied by one hundred Hurons and Algonquins, set out from Fort Ste Anne

in their opposition to the sale of brandy to the Indians, as were some of the leading merchants in the colony—La Chesnaye and Le Ber, for example—and such senior officials as Tracy, Duchesneau, Pierre Boucher, and subsequently the Chevalier de Vaudreuil, Meneval the Governor of Acadia, Denonville, and the Intendant Champigny. Fur-traders such as Greysolon du Lhut and Louis Jolliet also voiced their opposition to the brandy trade. In New York, too, the officials strove to curb it, once they had seen its effects on the Iroquois.<sup>7</sup> Others in the colony, however, were just as strongly opposed to the imposition of any restraints on the sale of brandy. This group ranged in its membership from *coureurs de bois* and tavern-keepers to Talon, Frontenac, La Salle, La Mothe Cadillac, and Colbert himself. It is not without significance that these men all had a vested interest in the fur trade, nor that far greater profits could be made by trading brandy than any other commodity.

In 1668 Talon had had the existing edicts forbidding the sale of brandy to the Indians rescinded and the clergy had immediately intervened, maintaining that the issue fell within their province since it affected the morals, not only of the Indians, but of those who supplied them with liquor, and constituted a mortal sin. Bishop Laval had declared the matter a reserved case and ordered that those known to have traded brandy to the Indians be refused absolution. Colbert admitted that the clergy's stand was correct in principle, but he claimed that it was bad in practice because it would harm French commerce without achieving the ends desired by the clergy. He was strongly of the opinion that the Indians would stop at nothing to get liquor and, if the French refused it to them, they would go to the Dutch traders at Albany, there to imbibe protestant heresy along with English rum. "The Bishop and the Jesuit fathers," he had earlier stated, "without reflecting that prudence, not to mention Christian charity, requires that one should close his eyes to a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater one, or to achieve an end that transcends the evil, refuse to alter their views in this matter."<sup>8</sup>

Frontenac was quick to agree with the Minister's views and he claimed that the attitude of the clergy was another example of their usurping the royal authority vested in the governor general. He also maintained that the seriousness of the problem had been grossly exaggerated and that the Indians got drunk no more readily than did the Dutch or English, and no one pretended that it was a sin to sell liquor to them. Anyone who disagreed with Frontenac on this issue he declared to be under Jesuit influence, which, of course, damned them in the eyes of Colbert.

The clergy were not without influence at the Court, and in 1678 the King gave orders that twenty of the leading men in the colony should be called together to give their views on the issue. Since Frontenac was

empowered to select the members of this so-called "Brandy Parliament" and Colbert sent his written views on the question, making it very plain what decision he wanted them to render, the outcome was easy to predict. One of the leading merchants, Aubert de la Chesnaye, who was not chosen to serve in this assembly, stated at the time that Frontenac chose only men who had a vested interest in the brandy trade and manipulated them "as a man in his position could easily do."<sup>9</sup> This was not strictly true, since five of the twenty members of the assembly declared themselves opposed to the trading of brandy to the Indians on religious, moral, and economic grounds; Louis Jolliet, the explorer, and Jacques Le Ber, reputed to be the wealthiest fur-trader in the colony, both declared that anyone caught taking liquor into the Indian villages should be hanged. But the majority view was that there should be no restriction on the brandy trade.<sup>10</sup>

The following year Louis XIV issued an edict which put an end to the dispute for the time being. He forbade anyone to carry liquor to the Indians in their villages, but allowed it to be sold to them, in moderate quantities, in the French settlements. At the same time the King ordered the Bishop to withdraw his interdict. The clergy well knew that Frontenac and those who shared his views could all too easily evade the intent of this edict, but they had to accept it without a murmur.

In some of their disputes with Frontenac the clergy found an ally in the newly appointed Intendant, Jacques Duchesneau, but it was Frontenac who was largely responsible for this alliance. An honest man, Duchesneau was also stubborn, and consequently became embroiled in disputes with Frontenac soon after his arrival. This naturally caused him to gravitate towards those others who were at odds with the Governor, until Frontenac found arrayed against himself what he labelled a cabal, consisting of the Intendant, the clergy, the Sovereign Council, and many of the leading merchants in the colony.

The latent hostility came to a head in a series of dramatic clashes between Frontenac and the Sovereign Council during the winter of 1678-79. Although Colbert had made it very plain in the King's *Déclaration* of 1675 that the intendant, and not the governor, was to preside over the meetings of the Sovereign Council, Frontenac could not abide this relegation of himself to a subordinate role in the Council's deliberations. To make matters worse, the Intendant and some of the councillors were very quick to make plain to him that his position in the Council was little more than that of an honorary councillor. On occasions when the Intendant was absent from the Council meetings and Frontenac tried to take over his duties, the Council insisted that it was not he but the senior councillor who was em-

few months later Fort Crèvecoeur was built on the Illinois, then Fort Prudhomme on the Mississippi below the Ohio. It was his intention to ship the furs down the Mississippi and to France through the Caribbean, bringing in supplies the same way, thus obviating the long voyage by canoe to Quebec City, then by ship down the St Lawrence and across the Atlantic.<sup>4</sup> This would have made the fur-trade posts in the Illinois country completely independent of New France.

Meanwhile, from these bases La Salle and his associates were able to monopolize the fur trade of the Illinois and Miamis tribes who, lacking canoes, had previously traded with the Ottawa middlemen. Now, when Frontenac issued permits to anyone to travel into the west he specifically stated that the holders were forbidden to do any trading in the area of La Salle's concession. La Salle himself, with Frontenac's sanction, granted permits to trade in this area as a means to discharge some of his heavy debts. Any *coureurs de bois* found in the region south of the Great Lakes without either Frontenac's or La Salle's sanction had their trade goods confiscated. Not satisfied with the establishment of this illegal monopoly La Salle sent his men to trade north of the Great Lakes, where better quality beaver was to be obtained.

At the same time as La Salle was establishing his fur-trade posts in the southwest, Daniel Greysolon, Sieur du Lhut, a cousin of Henri Tonti, was at the headwaters of the Mississippi. On July 2, 1679, in the great village of the Nadouecioux, he set up the arms of France, claiming these lands traversed twenty years earlier by Radisson and Groseilliers for Louis XIV. This mighty Sioux nation was, like the Iroquois, the inveterate enemy of the Algonquins and had forced these latter tribes to leave the Lake Superior area to settle at Lake Huron, where they were safe as long as the Iroquois remained at peace. It was Du Lhut's aim to effect a permanent peace settlement between the Sioux and the Ottawas, Assiniboines, Crees, and Saulteurs; open the vast area west of Lake Superior to trade as La Salle was doing to the south; then push westward to discover the western ocean. The Sioux, however, were too proud and warlike to entertain any serious thoughts of living at peace with their ancient enemies, and the Ottawa tribes were equally suspicious of the French overtures to the Sioux.

Du Lhut sent three of his men westward with a Sioux war party. How far they went is not known, but they returned the following summer with some salt which came, they were told by their Indian guides, from a great lake, twenty days' journey to the west, whose waters were not fit to drink. This convinced Du Lhut that the western ocean was within reach, and in June 1680 he crossed over the low height of land from Lake Superior to

the Mississippi, but abandoned his plans to voyage west when he learned that Father Hennepin, a Récollet with La Salle's men, and two other Frenchmen, had been captured by the Sioux earlier that summer and were being kept by them as slaves. He now travelled down the Mississippi, instead of to the west, located the Sioux who held the French captives, and obtained their release. For this action he received little thanks. La Salle, in a lengthy memoir to the Minister accused Du Lhut of engaging in illicit trade with the western tribes and of claiming to have been the first to explore the country of the Sioux when La Salle's men had earned this honour.<sup>5</sup> Most of the accusations that La Salle levelled at Du Lhut could, with greater justice, have been made against himself.

In 1681 Du Lhut crossed to France to plead, like Jolliet, for a seigneurie in the new lands he had discovered, and like Jolliet without success. He returned, briefly, to the Sioux country in 1683 but then confined his activities in the west to the lands of the Assiniboines and Ottawas north of the Great Lakes. Thus La Salle was allowed to enjoy his monopoly of the Mississippi fur trade unchallenged. The rival Montreal traders, meanwhile, with their main base at Michilimackinac, spread out to the west and north, over the lakes, swamps, and rivers of the Canadian shield until they reached the open prairies of the Lake Winnipeg region.

As the number of men deserting the colony for the west steadily increased, Colbert issued new edicts forbidding all trade with the Indians beyond the confines of the colony, but they had no effect whatsoever. The Intendant Duchesneau suggested that the situation might improve were permits to be issued for some ten, fifteen, or twenty canoes a year to be allowed to go to the west to trade, granting the permits to Canadian families in turn according to need. Colbert, to everyone's surprise, seized on this suggestion. He had come to realize that the problem could not be solved by threats of punishment; there were by this time far too many *coureurs de bois* to punish them all for breaking the law. In 1681, with a gesture almost of despair, he issued two edicts, one granting an amnesty to all *coureurs de bois* who returned immediately to the colony, the other initiating the *congé* system suggested by Duchesneau. Up to twenty-five of these *congés*, or licences, could be granted jointly by the governor or intendant each year, and no one was to receive a *congé* two years in succession.

Those who received *congés* did not have to go to the west themselves, they could hire canoemen to go for them; each *congé* allowed one canoe with three men to go upcountry to trade. The recipients could also sell their *congés* if they wished, and it was not long before they were changing hands for ten to eleven hundred *livres* each. The Minister was quick to

