Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth Century Montreal

Louise Dechêne

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Studies on the History of Quebec /
Études d'histoire du Québec

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Translated by Liana Vardi

McGill-Queen's University Press
Montreal & Kingston • London • Buffalo

ISBN 0-7735-0658-6 (cloth)
ISBN 0-7735-0951-8 (paper)

Legal deposit fourth quarter 1992
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

Printed in Canada on acid-free paper

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Social Science Federation of Canada, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

This book is a translation of *Habitants et Marchands de Montréal au XVII^e siècle*, published by les Editions Plons, Paris, in 1974 and reprinted by Les Éditions du Boréal, Montreal, in 1988. Translation of the original work was supported by a grant from the Canada Council.

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Dechêne, Louise, 1932–
Habitants and merchants in seventeenth-century Montreal
(Studies on the history of Quebec)
Includes bibliographical references.
Translation of: Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVIIe siècle.
ISBN 0-7735-0658-6 (bound)
ISBN 0-7735-0951-8 (pbk)
1. Montréal (Quebec) – Social conditions.
2. Montréal (Quebec) – Economic conditions.
3. Canada – History – To 1763 (New France).
4. Montréal (Quebec) – Population – History.
I. Title. II. Series.
HN110.M63D4213 1992 971.4'28014 C92-090231-6

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Preface

The English translation of *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVIIe siècle* has been many years in the making; almost twenty years separate this publication from the original edition. During this interval, research on early Canada has advanced rapidly on two fronts: the study of French settlements and the history of Indians and Indian-European relations. In the first area, colonial trade, agriculture, demographic and social reproduction, family, religion, and various cultural manifestations are some of the themes which have been investigated by a new generation of scholars. Many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century parishes have been the subject of doctoral dissertations and these findings have begun to appear in print. New issues have been raised and old ones are being reformulated. In short, the history of New France is very much alive and in the mainstream of social history.

But these are relatively recent developments. When I undertook this community study of early Montreal, the political narrative dominated the field and it paid scant attention to the colonists as such. Canadians were lumped together under the ill-defined labels of *habitants* or *coureurs de bois*, the terms being more or less interchangeable. They were presented as brave, vain, footloose, and improvident, happy to let the government and the Church take care of their needs. Plots could vary but colonial society remained an abstraction. It was not an object of research. Cole Harris's 1966 book, *The Seigneurial System in Early Canada*, stood as an exception. Based on official and legalistic aggregate data, it did not come closer to the settlers' experience, but its analytical approach, focus on the rural landscape, and discussion of the important issues marked a turning point. For me it acted as an incentive to probe in these directions.

My training had been largely in the history of Ancien-Régime France and, initially, strictly practical considerations (the impossibility of travelling abroad) made me choose a Canadian setting for my research. The French historians of the 1960s, as often noted, placed a heavy emphasis on structures and continuities and a great faith in numbers, but the lessons from the Continent went beyond these methodological aspects. In these carefully crafted books, replete with minute observations, one gained a sense of time and context, one learned a way of dealing with people of the past with sensitivity and respect. Could such methods, designed for stable, socially differentiated human groups, be used to study early Montrealers? If the settlers really had followed erratic ways of life outside the normal pattern of European and colonial history elsewhere, the answer would have been no. But the minute I began to investigate the many traces left by the immigrants and their children, this assumption proved false. Local evidence showed the seriousness of purpose of these peasants, concerned with the security of their families, and of merchants and traders seeking respectability and profits. Beneath the apparent chaos of the new settlement, lasting patterns very soon emerged in economic activity as well as in cultural attitudes. The issue of change *versus* continuity is the underlying theme of each chapter and, if one sums up the partial findings, the emphasis clearly falls on the side of continuity. Old institutions took root, hierarchy prevailed as the base of public order, and, in spite of the advantages of the New World environment, the old material, social, and cultural constraints still commanded the rhythm of development. In this small fur trade outpost and the surrounding countryside, another traditional society was spontaneously recreated, albeit with its own distinctive features.

More recent research on rural Canada in the early modern period generally supports this view and in some cases reinforces it. Allan Greer's *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant* (1985), a major study of power relations and the peasant economy in three parishes settled in the mid-eighteenth century, is one example. However, some of the arguments I put forth twenty years ago, especially those in the conclusion, need to be modified in view of the theoretical and empirical advances in the field. Influenced by models that were popular in the 1970s, I exaggerated the separation between agriculture and the mercantile sector. This led me to assume that uniformity of farm production and egalitarian inheritance arrangements, so visible among these seventeenth-century Montreal peasants, would be enduring features. New evidence has shown that, on the contrary, inequality increased over time and was linked to an

important system of local exchange in goods and services that fed into larger markets. Fortunately, these rash projections into the future were few and, in general, the analysis did not stray too far from the evidence. And when I had doubts about the solidity of certain hypotheses, I shared them with the readers.

There are many facets of the life of early Montrealers that the book ignored or treated too superficially. In some instances, this was due to a lack of documentation. It was very frustrating, for example, to find next to nothing about the Indian village located on the island or about the summer fur fair, a high point in the annual calendar for Montrealers and their native visitors. Other omissions were a matter of choice. There was no time to deal adequately with the nascent artisanal community, to investigate the impact of wars and the military presence, or to pay more attention to religious attitudes, to mention only a few of the neglected topics. As important as they were, these came lower in the order of priorities. Because so little was known about this population it was essential to start at the beginning and, for me, this meant the nature of immigration and the socioeconomic foundations of the urban and rural settlements, trade, and agriculture. In spite of everything that has been written of late criticizing this conventional materialist approach, I still think it is the most appropriate. This does not imply any rejection of the new analytical tools today's historians are using, but why should these exciting innovations make the former approach to community studies obsolete? How can we find our way around this peoples', or any peoples', culture, make sense of their rituals, read their emotions, interpret their submission and their resistance, if we remain ignorant of the basic facts about their material and social environment?

Because it brings these facts to light, and because it raises problems which are still relevant to present debates, this book may deserve a second life. But that is for the reader to judge. Thanks are due to McGill-Queen's University Press, who never ceased to believe in this project, particularly to Joan McGilvray, who tried to make me share her optimism, and also to Liana Vardi who made the original translation, and Allan Greer and Thomas Wien, who took time to revise part of it.

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Introduction

The problem underlying and inspiring this study is how a colonial society was formed and shaped by European settlers under the twin influences of tradition and North American experiences. Its subject is therefore transition and adaptation, a subject that Canadian historians have tended to neglect by concentrating on imperial policies, metropolitan rivalries, and administrative decisions. Those who have delved into the social aspects of the French regime have turned to the brief lull between two wars in the eighteenth century, when the colony's particular features were already more or less in place. Works on the earlier period of gestation usually focus on political and military events, or on important personages; the colonists appear only as coureurs de bois whom the authorities try to settle. To link this picture to that of the habitants of a later century who, from their barn doors, fought off the invaders who threatened their homeland, one must examine the evolution of this society step by step, for it has left more records than the reactions of a handful of administrators or memorialists unmoved by daily life, or of travellers in search of the picturesque, all of whose impressions, endlessly reprinted, have served only to bolster the preoccupations of various authors and interpreters.

The study requires an analysis of immigration, of the origins of the settlers, followed by study of the socio-professional categories that arose in this specific context and income levels and lifestyles. Yet once this is done, will we have reached a fuller understanding of the new realities, still couched in traditional terms, of the forces governing this particular social structure? Description is simply not enough, for should a deeper analysis corroborate that Canadian society did indeed move away from its origins in the Ancien Régime, this shift would demand an explanation. Our investigation must

begin by focusing on the system of production and exchange, and on the interplay between these two sectors, so that we may gauge the exact role of the participants. Our survey will also deal with social linkages rooted in other times and other places, which were first imposed upon and then gradually incorporated into the local organization.

The interplay of various influences upon the colonists – the environment, the economy, the cultural baggage of the immigrants, the institutions of the Ancien Régime, and the new society emerging rapidly from this network – is very complex. Capturing this changing, multifaceted reality is an ambitious project, and it could not have been realized for the whole of New France. The colony was small, but the settlers were as scattered as the sources a researcher would need to consult. That is why this work became a monograph on the Island of Montreal. A local study can be significant if it covers the essential characteristics that shaped a larger destiny. Montreal, a nexus of activity, answers those requirements. The fur trade led to the creation of this inland trading post, but the agriculture that developed alongside was similar to that of other parts of the colony. It provides an excellent standpoint from which to examine the links between a commercial centre and its hinterland. The focus may indeed be confined to a small group, but in 1720 its five thousand inhabitants were one-fifth of the Canadian population of European origin. The sample is therefore relatively important and, given the well-circumscribed locale, it becomes possible to gather documentation substantial enough to yield a basic analysis of conditions that were widespread.

The only statistical information available for the whole of the colony survives in the odd census, so chary of details during the seventeenth century. There is nothing on the migratory movements, nothing on the volume of trade prior to 1729, nothing on the actual occupation of the land or on agricultural yields. There are no cadastral surveys or market price lists or major tax rolls. The administrative correspondence between Québec and Versailles is incomplete for the first decades and especially poor in descriptions of material life. By contrast, for the Island of Montreal, a well-run seigneury, quantitative and qualitative evidence is fairly abundant, and includes lists of immigrants and of censitaines, tax rolls, court records, and seigneurial correspondence. I undertook a simple compilation of parish-register data with the sole aim of establishing the link between demographic patterns and the way of life. These records are difficult to use because of the relative importance of migration movements in the seventeenth century. Besides, demographers at the University of Montreal have undertaken a massive project on family reconstitution

for the entire colonial population, and it would have been pointless to anticipate their research.

I obtained most of my information from notarial records. I took down every partnership, obligation, hiring contract, and merchant inventory, and this enabled me to trace the nature and evolution of trading activities. A variety of deeds relating to agriculture, land grants, land sales and leases, and rural estate inventories, once organized, threw new light on life in the countryside. Notaries also provided information on social and family relations. I had to work with thousands of deeds, and sometimes the results fell short of my expectations, but always, with supplementary evidence, they yielded elements of information.

There are other limitations to this research, the first a chronological one. I meant to show how the economic system and the society came to be, how, by the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the process had been completed, and how the initial phase of adaptation and quick transformation came to an end. What began in tentative and chaotic fashion evolved into a coherent and lasting organization. From then on the colony did not cease to develop – far from it – but it adopted a more normal pace.

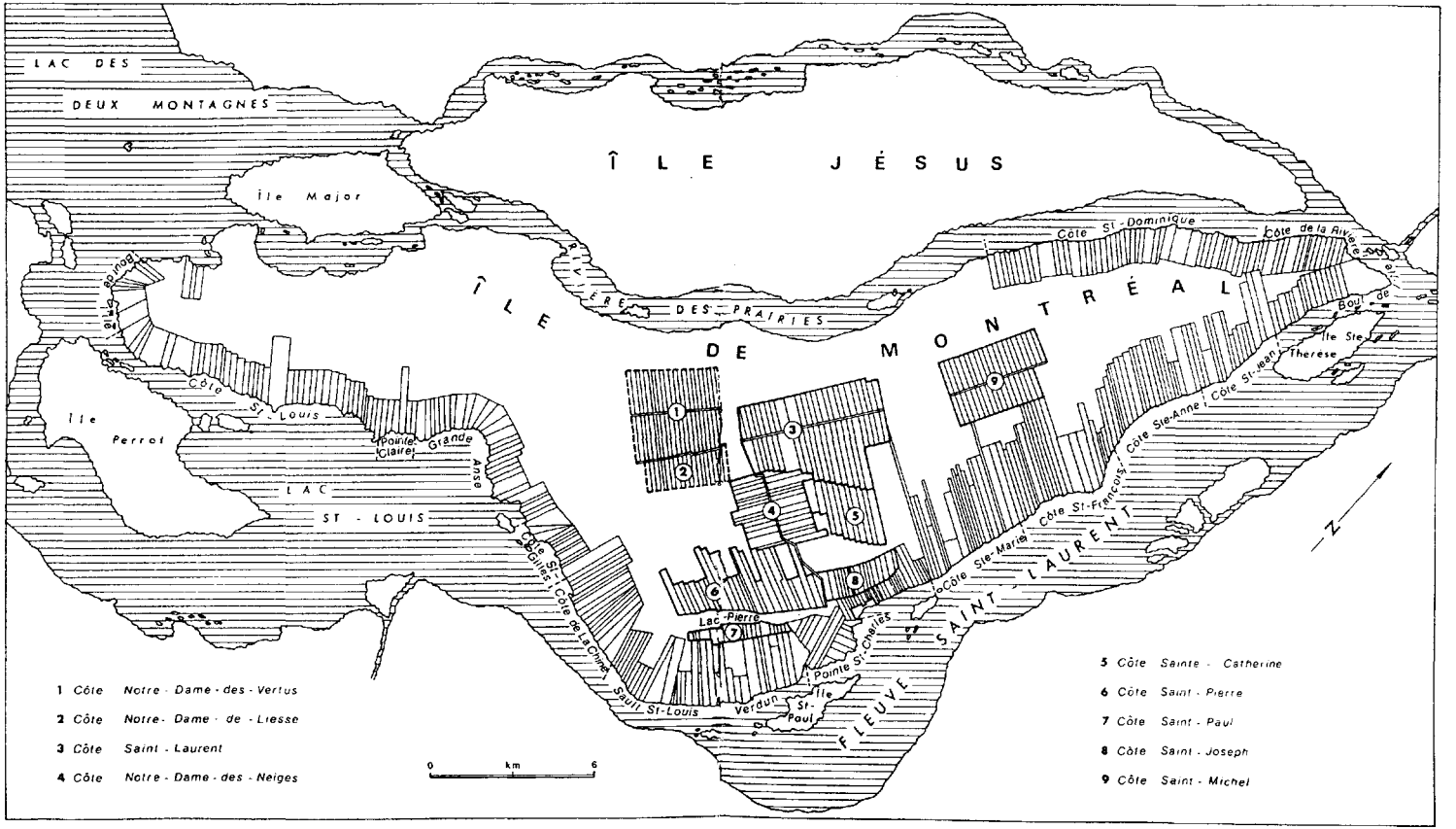
This study does not pretend to cover every issue affecting Canada over the seven decades from 1642 to around 1713. Montreal's political history was strongly linked to French imperial destinies, but I purposely left this aspect aside, since others have dealt with it before me and done it well. I am obliged to them for providing me with the key to those events. Nor do I propose to discuss the factors that hindered the colony from developing along the lines of the English colonies. The problems lay elsewhere: in the unfavourable location and in the France of Louis XIV, which did not encourage emigration. I was interested in what actually happened and not in what might have been in other places and circumstances. Yet I cannot pretend that focusing on Montreal can provide a complete picture, since many of the links between France and Canada stopped in Quebec. Nevertheless, I believe that one gains useful insights by illuminating the hinterland. For what mattered in the long run was the local organization and the society it nurtured rather than the metropolitan companies. I did not see any point in expounding on the general aspects of civil, military, or religious institutions, and so concentrated on those that had a direct bearing on the life of Montrealers, lightly touching on familiar matters while stressing lesser-known features, such as the seigneury, the family, and the parish.

This book, therefore, integrates a number of separate investigations that aim to address the same problem. Each was carried out with as

much rigour as possible, but only some of the queries could be answered fully. I suggest some hypotheses for the remainder, and I sometimes put forth an interpretation, without attempting to hide the weaknesses in the argument. Is this not the way in which our knowledge of the past advances? If my inadequacies stimulate other research in these areas, my work will have been useful.

I would like to thank all those who helped me to bring this study to fruition, especially Professor Robert Mandrou of the Hautes Etudes and the University of Paris X, Nanterre, who agreed to supervise the work and who provided unstinting support. The list of colleagues and friends to whom I turned for advice and who were always so encouraging is too long to reproduce. May each one read individual thanks in these lines. I also wish to record my gratitude to the Canada Council, to McGill University, and to the University of Ottawa, whose financial help allowed me to carry out this research, and to Suzanne Mineau and Rita Wallot for their invaluable assistance, as well as to the numerous archivists and librarians who made access to the many documents I needed easier for me. François, Geneviève, and Julie all accepted that I would be spending most of these last years in the seventeenth century. I thank them for their patience.

The Island of Montreal in 1702, after a plan drawn by the seigneurs



Source: L. Beauregard, "Géographie historique des côtes de l'île de Montréal."
Cahiers de géographie du Québec 28, nos 73–74 (1984): 53

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PART ONE

The Population

This study begins with the people, natives and Frenchmen, who gradually congregated around a concept, a fort, a store. Of the former we know too little. Historians traditionally have consigned them to the background, and for lack of evidence we are unable to take this petty and static vision much further, to describe the roles they played in this particular establishment. The French left their mark in census material and parish registers, and these permit a detailed reconstruction of immigration that is completed by a broad sketch of demographic trends.

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CHAPTER ONE

Native People

1 LOCAL TRIBES

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the population of the Great Lake and Laurentian regions experienced major shifts. The Iroquoians, semi-sedentary horticulturists who had occupied lowland villages such as Hochelaga on Montreal Island during Cartier's voyages, had left by the time the French came to settle in 1642. The length of their stay along the river, the reason for their retreat, as well as their prior links to the Algonkians, have received various interpretations. The quasi-nomadic habits of a large number of some Iroquois groups and the horticultural concerns of a large number of Algonkian tribes argue against any strict identification between language and lifestyle. A capacity for quick adaptation to the environment and for borrowing from neighbouring groups must have reduced the cleavages existing between these cultures.[1]

The French established themselves on what was practically unoccupied ground, but their presence, like that of the Dutch along the Hudson, stimulated trade and, as a consequence, exacerbated ancient rivalries among Iroquoian tribes located on either side of Lake Ontario.[2] The Five Nation Confederacy's destruction of Huronia in the decade that followed the founding of Montreal proved a short-lived triumph. Huron control of northern markets fell to the Ottawa and other Algonkians who became the French's major suppliers. Worried that their furs might be diverted towards New Amsterdam, the French strove to consolidate their alliances and to subjugate the Iroquois. This policy proved a tortuous one, expansionist and aggressive on the commercial front but militarily faint-hearted and defensive.[3] The War of the League of Augsburg fused such rivalries within the larger Anglo-French conflict, and native peoples appeared mostly as mercenaries in the pay of the Europeans.[4]

About 80,000 Indians lived within an 800-kilometer radius of Montreal in present-day Quebec and Ontario.[5] Within a 250-kilometer radius the Iroquois territory contained a total of some 50,000 people and some villages with over 1,000 inhabitants; this was the only area of relatively high population density. About 4,000 Algonkians still dwelt along the North Shore, while a few scattered bands of Mohicans crossed the hazy boundaries of New England to the French settlements. These were Montreal's closest neighbours. The Ojibwa, reckoned at 20,000, formed a more compact group to the west, between the Ottawa River and other concentrations along Lake Michigan, but they only visited the colony occasionally. As for the Northern Cree, they rarely ventured downstream. The Montagnais did not travel west, and the Micmacs and Abenaki seldom penetrated the Montreal plain before the eighteenth century. Despite this geographic dispersal, links were soon forged between the Indians distributed along the huge Saint Lawrence basin and the French who occupied the valley. Proselytism, trade, and warfare stimulated readier contacts than the layout of settlement would suggest.

The studies undertaken by anthropologists and ethno-historians provide a clearer understanding of the nature of pre-Columbian civilization and the sort of tensions that arose from contact with the Europeans.[6] If contemporary eyewitness accounts can help to shed light on the cultural make-up of these societies and on their subsequent transformations, the very same documents can in turn be read to assess changes in the perceptions of the onlookers.[7] This last approach has, however, proved both less fruitful and less satisfactory because we still know too little about the outlook of the community experiencing this contact. For surely neither the Jesuits, who, according to circumstances, denounced the original sin they had come to extirpate or exalted the innate virtues of their catechumens and even displayed some cultural relativism, nor La Hontan, who voiced the bitterness and hopes of the early eighteenth century, nor any of the administrators or chroniclers, could be said to represent the mass of settlers.[8]

Only rarely does a chapter devoted to the impact made by native civilization soar beyond material and technical borrowings – foodstuffs or medicinal plants, means of transport, and hunting, fishing, or fighting methods.[9] A description of the mores of the coureurs be bois follows such enumerations, with the inevitable characterization of the Canadian as sturdy, carefree, insubordinate, even corrupt, as some would have it – features hastily imputed to Indian influence.[10] Except for a few works, such as Marcel Giraud's, the physical setting and the process of acclimatization get short shrift. Giraud

concludes in his excellent study of the Canadian Métis that the Laurentian colony never felt the pull of native society to the point of surrendering its own identity. But harsh living conditions, coupled with unavoidable links with native peoples, bred a familiarity that heralded the closer ties forged in the interior and paved the way for the eventual integration of a sizable portion of Canadians into the other culture.[11] Whether they simply facilitated later associations or were strong enough to alter the character of the peasantry within half a century, such contacts are still poorly understood. Yet before we take this analysis further, it is imperative to clarify the mentality of the immigrants and the influences under which they laboured.

The structure of colonial society played as significant a role in determining the perceptions of native civilization as did the nature, frequency, and intensity of contacts. To define these relations, to find out which traits of Indian behaviour were really perceived by the average colonist, would be a challenging and exciting study, but it can only be done for the entire colony. It is impossible, given our limited focus and the scarcity of local sources, to impart more than a few observations that might eventually help to reveal the impact of each culture on the other and traces of this conflict in values that supposedly engendered regressive acculturation.[12]

We are emphasizing the perceptions of the settlers and not those of a minority like the coureurs be bois. For every Etienne Brûlé one could probably find twenty inhabitants who never ventured beyond the Lachine rapids and another score whose experience of the wilds was a brief and painful campaign endured rather than welcomed.[13] The vision of native peoples elaborated during the tentative contacts that preceded actual settlement undoubtedly reflect Indian harmony and pride, which the traveller, venturing alone in the wilds, would discover and retain the more easily if he were predisposed to accept the values he encountered.[14] But we believe that the ordinary contacts within the French settlement were of a different kind.

2 RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

At first the natives came spontaneously to meet the French. They brought them furs and lingered willingly around their settlements. Montreal soon had its contingent of Indians, and even if conversion was perfunctory, the seventy-six baptisms performed by the resident Jesuit in 1643 alone prove that native families remained in the vicinity. Baptisms continued to figure in parish registers until 1653 (although less frequently) and attest to the regular flow of visitors and to tentative settlement.[15] In the wake of the upheavals that

accompanied the invasion of Huronia, various Algonkian and Iroquoian bands, cut off from their tribes by war, famine, and epidemics, moved to the valley. Merchants and missionaries, all pursuing their own interests, persuaded a number to settle in the colony. In a period of increasing peril, when settlers stuck close to their fields and few regular shipments of pelts came in from the west, the small Indian nucleus nestled by the storehouses could ensure a steady if not plentiful supply of furs. Merchants readily extended credit to these Indians, while the priests kept an eye on their families during the long hunting season. The authorities encouraged these settlements and showed great liberality towards such valuable military auxiliaries. One would be hard put to say whether the Indians viewed the material benefits as a mere by-product of conversion or as a major incentive.

In the first two decades of colonization the Indians were free to settle where they liked.[16] The Sulpicians placed several families on their Gentilly property and, in 1671, opened La Montagne mission, half a league from the town. Almost simultaneously, the Jesuits founded the mission known as Sault-Saint-Louis, or Kahnawake on their South-Shore seigneury of Laprairie-de-la-Madeleine. In both cases they were dealing with partly sedentary Indian hunters and farmers, mainly Iroquois in the case of the Jesuits, or Iroquois by adoption or enslavement in the case of the Sulpicians.[17] These missions relocated periodically, both to distance themselves from the taverns and to replace exhausted corn soils. In 1696 La Montagne was transferred north to Sault-au-Récollet, and in 1721 to the seigneury of Lac-des-deux-Montagnes. The Jesuits moved their Sault settlement on three separate occasions progressively further west.[18] The Sulpicians ministered separately to a small group of Algonkians located at the end of the island, in Baie d'Urfé (and later on the Ile aux Tourtes).[19]

Table 1 shows that resident Indians outnumbered the French up to 1666–68, after which their relative population size dropped rapidly. Epidemics, notably smallpox, which hit in 1687, took a heavy toll on the missions' populations, after which numbers stagnated. The sample is too small, however, to permit a thorough analysis. The table indicates quite clearly, however, that the ratio between women and children under fifteen rarely exceeded 1 and that in 1688 and 1695 it lay between 0.7 and 0.4. Similar rough calculations show that in the same period this ratio for the European population varied between 2 and 2.7. The imbalance between the sexes, always noticeable among the Indians, was certainly increased by the regular participation of men in military campaigns.

Table 1
Indian population settled in the vicinity of Montreal, 1666–1716

Year	*1666*	*1685*	*1688*	*1692*	*1695*	*1716*
Houses	–	104	106	117	–	–
Men	–	197	202	140	206	270
Boys fifteen and over	–	44	43	73	46	92
Women	–	255	195	233	288	362
Girls fifteen and over	–	36	40	22	32	55
Children of both sexes, younger than fifteen	–	372	136	253	129	398
Total Indian population	1,000(*)	904	616	721	701	1,177
French population enumerated on the Island of Montreal	659	1,720	1,413	1,341	2,161	4,409

Source: Colonial census, AC, C1, 460 and 461. Missions were no longer included after 1716.
*As there is no mission census prior to 1685, an approximation of 1,000 inhabitants was retained, although it may be too low since everyone agrees that their population dwindled between 1650 and 1685. The Montreal region was less affected, however, than those of Trois-Rivières and Quebec.

The extra Indian women found husbands among their own people beyond the mission walls, and the consequent resurgence of paganism created moral dilemmas for the Sulpicians.[20] Contemporaries all remarked on the natives' low birthrate. Talon, the intendant, ascribed it to the heavy tasks allotted the women as well as to prolonged breast-feeding, both of which practices he imagined changing through police regulations.[21] Yet aside from such factors, could this not be another example of the cataclysm that shrank the number of native peoples from Baffin Island to Tierra del Fuego? Infants succumbed to European viruses and to new foodstuffs that replaced a traditional diet.[22] Women, still responsible for the heavy labour and often mistreated by husbands they could no longer divorce, began to despair. The need to love and procreate languished, along with the will to live, in these first generations torn between two worlds. "We rarely see the natives age," one governor remarked.[23]

New arrivals were not sufficient to arrest the demographic slump. Whatever allure the colony had once held for the Indians evaporated. The Jesuits concentrated their efforts on far-off Algonkian missions and lost faith in mass conversions among the Iroquois, whose wavering allegiance had now fallen to the English. The extension of the fur-trading network meant that merchants were no longer keen to attract hunters and western middlemen to nonproductive areas. From time to time an Iroquois family having diffi-

culties in its homeland or slaves escaping their condition might seek asylum in the missions, but this trickle was too weak to reverse the trend. The trend reversed itself in the eighteenth century with the establishment of a new mission on the West Island and the integration of prisoners captured in French raids on New York and New England during the War of the Spanish Succession.[24] Some of the captives were Indian, but most were women and children of European extraction. They were adopted, and the missionaries lost no time in converting them. This procedure raised such outcries in the neighbouring colonies that the authorities of New France were careful to publish no statistics. The Indians' legitimate booty could not be forcibly removed. Vigorous English protests and a bishop's pastoral spurred wealthy Canadians to buy back some of the prisoners. Others managed to escape; some of the women found husbands in the colony, and New England envoys secured the return of a group of prisoners. Several children who had been taken very young were left with their adoptive families and figure in the 1716 mission census.[25] The mission population continued to rise in the eighteenth century through the slow but regular absorption of newcomers or Métis and presumably through natural increase, which suggests that the Indians were slowly adapting. Between 1735 and 1752 the Sault-Saint-Louis mission still contained about a thousand people, as did the one at Lac-des-deux-Montagnes, located further from Montreal.[26]

There were also a few Indians settled outside the missions, in the town and in the *côtes*. A number had stayed behind when the missions moved on; others had rejected clerical tutelage while still desiring to trade with the colonists, and others yet had been turned out of the missions for improper behaviour.[27] The authorities encouraged Canadian families to hire Indian children – a covert form of adoption. These youngsters were free when they came of age.[28]

Slavery, made official in 1709, gradually replaced adoption, which had always been negligible. Since the 1685 Code Noir did not at first apply to New France, the colonists were loath to invest in goods they could not legally secure. The slave trade only took off with the settlement of Louisiana, where Indians were sold to plantations or were transported to the West Indies, two Indians being worth one black. Western tribes – the Cree, Assiniboine, and especially the Pawnees from Missouri – were the objects of this traffic. Both fur traders and trading-post officials regularly brought slaves back to the colony, and according to Marcel Trudel, by the middle of the eighteenth century, merchants, civil officials, and military officers owned on the average two slaves apiece.[29] Slaves were quite

rare in our period, however, as is confirmed by estate inventories, and there were certainly not more than fifty or so on the Island of Montreal in 1716. Their presence raised the number of Indians unaccounted for and dispersed among the island's French population to about two hundred.

Mission Indians enumerated with the French were Christian and therefore royal subjects.[30] France long cherished the hope that the colony might absorb the entire native population. What better way indeed of nurturing the King's loyal subjects?[31] "The native population should be encouraged to live with the French by giving them land and common farms, by educating their children and having them marry."[32] Although this policy remained in effect, after 1675 the metropolitan authority ceased to concern itself with this matter or indeed with peopling Canada.

The Jesuits, who did not equate conversion with assimilation, frustrated the French policy by attempting to isolate new converts, even inside the colony. Their detractors, headed by Governor Frontenac and the Sulpicians, claimed that they made no attempt to alter native lifestyles and did not teach the Indians how to read or speak French for fear of the corrupting influence of the settlers, who might weaken their hold over them.[33] The Sulpicians prided themselves on following royal directives. "We believe," one of them declared, "that they profit by living among us, and not in their own land; that they must be taught our language, that their women must wear skirts and their men hats and pants; that they must adopt French housing; learn animal husbandry, and how to sow wheat and root vegetables; and that they must be able to read and hear mass and be taught the holy rites."[34] Less generous as proselytizers and more fussy about matters of dogma and morals, the Sulpicians did not glorify the primitive state and encouraged racial integration, which they felt would elevate rather than corrupt the Indians. For "congress with the French was only dangerous in unruly Michilimackinac, where no French woman dared venture. Inside the colony, with its married women and rather strict laws, the natives fared better than in their sin-infested, magic-ridden homeland."[35] Such principles would bend in the face of widespread drunkenness, yet the Sulpicians held fast to their methods. At Kahnawake, however, which had no school, and where they were never completely cut off from their New York tribesmen, the Iroquois did not learn French. Since the Indians seem to have refused to gibber in French, the colonists had to acquire a smattering of various native languages. Yet surprisingly few Indian words entered the French tongue until the middle of the eighteenth century.[36]

The missions cannot be regarded as "true reservations cut off from civilization" along the lines of Latin American *reduciones*.[37] Whether they advocated or opposed segregation proved immaterial to the Sault-Saint-Louis Indians, who had as many dealings with the settlers as their Montreal counterparts. The Jesuits' aims could not be achieved without a complete overhaul of the economic foundations of the missions, which remained anchored in the fur trade and thus in the life of the colony.[38]

Besides, there was no point fencing in sedentary Indians while the town gates were thrown wide open to visitors from the west. Every August Montreal welcomed hundreds of members of various nations to its annual fur fair.[39] Although numbers dwindled after 1680, once the furs were gathered at source, the fair itself survived until the turn of the century.[40] It continued to be attended by as many as five hundred to one thousand Indians hoping for better terms than those afforded by the voyageurs, and by envoys on official visits, whom the governor greeted with great ceremony.[41] The fair was held on the communal plot stretching between the town and the river, in principle the only authorized trading ground. The visitors camped in and around this area, located beyond the urban enclosure. Anyone could buy furs, but those who rented a stall had the ascendency, while soldiers and archers did a brisk trade on their own behalf or that of their officers under the guise of protecting the Indians from local cupidity.[42] In this ebullient atmosphere, where deals were struck on the spot without witnesses or interpreters, disorder proved unavoidable. At best, the worst violence was averted.[43]

One intendant actually suggested lodging the visitors on a small island, under guard, "to avoid their being insulted and so that the French do them no harm," but the run of conflicts did not justify such extreme measures.[44] Having sold their furs, the Indians lingered on the island, and for a few weeks the publicans and peasants who retailed illegal brandy made excellent money. Having thus jettisoned part of the European goods they had come to fetch, the visitors mended their canoes and returned home. They enlivened the town with their presence until late September.

3 CONTACTS

In addition to these disheartening summer encounters, the settlers came into regular daily contact with Indian residents. Some suburban residents attended Mass at La Montagne, which was closer than the parish church. For a long time settlers in Rivière-des-Prairies

depended on the offices of the Sault-au-Récollet missionary, while the Jesuit mission provided a similar service for the Laprairie-de-la-Madeleine colonists, who were without a church.[45] These weekly meetings provided opportunities for Indian and French to become better acquainted.

At La Montagne their children attended the same school. The nuns imparted various skills deemed appropriate for the girls, such as knitting, while the schoolmaster taught the boys French, reading, writing, woodwork, and Latin canticles for the church.[46] Royal subsidies for native education allowed the neighbouring colonists' sons to learn more than the weekly catechism, all that was taught to youngsters in other *côtes*.

The Indians erected their bark-and-branch housing near the fort surrounding the mission buildings and sowed corn and beans on land to which they held no legal title. The Crown had placed the land under trusteeship and "for excellent reasons established the Reverend Fathers of the Company of Jesus as trustees and guardians of the Indians of New France, for the said Indians have been deemed incapable of managing the Property they are given." The monarch conferred seigneuries on the Natives "with the proviso that the said Indians will be and always remain under the guidance, direction, and protection of the Fathers."[47] Their trustees allocated them part of these seigneuries and gradually granted the remaining parcels to French colonists. This meant that the Indians could no longer clear the land gradually and break in new ground to replace exhausted soils in their customary manner.[48] Once French farms surrounded the mission, the Indians were forced to relocate further afield and start from scratch. The natives never regained the ownership of the seigneuries, which simply devolved to the Company of Jesus.

Conditions were different on the Island of Montreal, which belonged outright to the Sulpicians. No one can accuse them of usurpation, since they never granted any land to the Indians. "We have been told," wrote their procurator "that no land is transferred to the Indians in return for seigneurial dues, that such is not the custom in New France, but that they get only the usufruct of the lots placed at their disposal."[49] The issue came up repeatedly. "The decision not to grant land owing Cens and Rentes to the Indians should be strictly obeyed, for as they are unreliable, these parcels would soon escheat to the Crown. One can, however, set aside and verbally allot them an amount they can properly clear and cultivate. Yet if these Indians subsequently depart either to transfer their dwellings elsewhere or for some other reason, the Seminary will

have to repossess and would be well advised to rent these parcels rather than to treat them as uncleared lots."[50]

Yet we know that the Indians were reluctant to leave La Montagne.[51] Either their petitions or those of the peasants who coveted their admirably situated lots spurred the procurator to confirm his stance. He declared that Indian lands were to merge with the demesne, that their harvest should certainly not be appraised, and that the Indians should be prevented from renting out land they did not own. For should this happen, the foreseeable result would be that the takers would not pay dues and thus fail to recognize seigneurial rights. It was best that the rent "be collected by the seigneurs who might then assist the Indians."[52] The subsequent move from Sault-au-Récollet to Lac-des-Deux-Montagnes incited a similar response: "the plots cleared by the Indians will provide the Seminary with a whole new parish."[53]

The Indians, as Jesuit wards or Sulpician usufructuaries, were being dispossessed, but it took six or seven generations before this realization dawned and they grasped the meaning of private property.[54]

The missionaries convinced some families to build European-style housing at La Montagne, not far from the seigneurial domains, the farmer's quarters, the orchard, fishpond, and dovecote.[55] The settlers' fields lay scattered below. Since corn matured later than wheat, the French would damage Indian crops when they let their animals loose on harvested fields; common grazing in these parts was therefore put off until the middle of September. Indians soon added animal husbandry to horticulture and kept some chickens, pigs, or sometimes a cow.[56] In traditional fashion, these activities were relegated to the womenfolk, but they could neither plough the land nor grow European crops that required more time and other tools without male assistance. This agricultural produce hardly answered basic subsistence requirements or filled new needs. Whatever added income they could muster by peddling small objects in the town, or dressing hides for the voyageurs, still failed to cover the cost of blankets, tools, and now necessary utensils.[57] Missionary hand-outs of clothing, seeds, or food such as eels, remained mere expedients.[58]

The mission was still highly dependent on the fur trade, but military service interfered with such activity. Indians at Sault-Saint-Louis and Montreal furnished two to three hundred warriors, who fought in every campaign side by side with the colonial militias.[59] They received no other remuneration than their upkeep during the campaign and whatever they could loot.

When their services were not required, the men went off trapping

in the fall and were absent most of the winter.[60] Merchants advanced them muskets, powder, shot, knives, and other implements used for the journey or by their families, which they eventually repaid with pelts.[61] The Indians honoured their debts. The authorities were quick to denounce the occasional default, for the entire system rested on a pyramid of credit erected on countless small loans to the Indians. In estate inventories such claims are included among short-term sound debts.[62] The rest of the Indians' income would too often be frittered away in drink and bring little to the community.[63] Although a few young Indians served apprenticeships, most of the second and third generations were engaged in fur trading and wars, just as their forebears had been.

Although no evidence is available, the men may well have participated in the building of roads, ditches, palisades, and the like. Yet there was no economic pressure to retrain them for such tasks. They were expert at fashioning the bark canoes used by both the voyageurs and the troops, and the absence of notarized contracts for this activity implies that it rested mainly in Indian hands. Under what conditions, and for what profit? We cannot say.

But contemporary accounts suggest men wandering through the *côtes* and the streets of the town looking for fun and friendship. "We drank some cider at Laverdure, then beer at Crespeau's and afterwards went door-to-door to say our farewells before the wintering," three Sault-au-Récollet Indians recalled.[64] That two alehouses were wanted in a village of a hundred men only confirms this impression of idleness. While such authorized establishments fulfilled a necessary social function, the Indian who really wished to get drunk had to get his brandy elsewhere. An endless barrage of edicts, decrees, ordinances, and pastorals prohibited the sale of alcohol to the Indians – a measure of the ineffectuality of such edicts.[66] Loud and quarrelsome, these drunken figures sent packing from the town by the archers would regain the mission of an evening, terrifying the peasants on their way, for there were enough cases of rape, injury, or murder to unnerve the population and to raise an outcry against these unfortunate drunkards.[67] The protests became even more shrill against the Indians' intoxicators and the sluggish authorities who neither protected nor punished. Torn between the Indians, who denied responsibility for crimes committed under the influence and who rejected French criminal statutes (to which they were deemed answerable), and settlers who clamoured for justice, the authorities bided their time.[68] They buried themselves in useless trials, undertaken to silence the one group, then dropped to pacify the other.[69]

4 INTERMARRIAGE

Despite initial official encouragement, intermarriage remained far from common. The three thousand livres set aside annually as a dowry to settle sixty Indian brides with French husbands were soon allocated elsewhere.[70] There are only seven mixed marriages registered on the Island of Montreal between 1642 and 1712, but this is hardly the whole picture, for it should not be forgotten that unions were usually blessed in the bride's parish, in many cases a mission for which no registers are extant. And it could be that the ethnic origins of Indians with French last names would not be recorded. Yet even with such omissions the proportion of interracial unions remained quite low, even for the early period, with its excess of males. Only later, in the west, would the temporary relationships between voyageurs and Indian girls who rendered invaluable assistance become long-lasting and often be legitimized by missionaries.[71] But such unions were usually confined to the hinterland.

The colonist who settled on the land or practised some craft had no incentive to take an Indian wife. We know of one case where the Sulpicians urged one of their servants to marry a girl from La Montagne and settle down in the mission.[72] But the reverse – Indian women integrated within the French community – was more common, though the evidence is elusive. If they survived their first confinement, how many of these brides, uprooted too suddenly, went back to their people? If mixed marriages are difficult to find, it is probably because such alliances were usually contracted by obscure individuals – a fact overshadowed by a few striking exceptions.[73]

Miscegenation was therefore usually a matter of illegitimacy, although *a priori* neither Iroquois mores nor the life of the missions encouraged promiscuity. These Indians were monogamous; the easy dissolution of marriages encouraged fidelity, and while girls were given much freedom, they took care if they wanted a husband.[74] Christianity imposed a stricter code, but if ancient restrictions no longer applied, it proved difficult to impose new ones. The governor reported that young noblemen took advantage of Indian women whom they kept in the *côtes*, and it was said that some mission women led scandalous lives. Such behaviour, often associated with alcohol, incurred the Indian community's disapproval and repudiation. Women with shorn heads were not unknown in the missions.[75]

The integration of illegitimate and adopted children soon altered the ethnic character of these sparsely populated Indian villages. But the handful of Indians slowly absorbed by white society and the

half-breeds scattered around the missions were hardly sufficient to effect a racial transformation of the larger group.[76]

Even on this reduced scale, the difference between the behaviour of voyageurs and settlers recalls the contrast between Spanish and Anglo-Saxon patterns of colonization, the one with heavy and the second with limited interbreeding. This divergence can be traced, according to Chaunu, to specific circumstances rather than to psychological attitudes: namely, the relative size of the two groups in question and the type of economic activity.[77]

5 COLLECTIVE PERCEPTIONS

Except for references to the missionaries' trials and to policies formulated to deal with the natives, seventeenth-century sources yield only these few vague and negative traces to describe the Indian communities established around Montreal. After their initial enthusiasm, officials did no more than ensure that the Indian settlements quietly filled their expected functions: to provide furs and to be warriors.

After all, since the colonists' perceptions were shaped at the very time when Indian civilization was rocked by violent culture shock, could they view the Indians as anything other than pitiful savages? However trying their own circumstances, the first settlers had come face to face with a more beleaguered group. No matter what they had endured before emigrating, the Europeans encountered native people who suffered even greater alienation. After two decades of hard work the settler had a house, a cleared stretch of land, and status within rural society. Two decades after its establishment conditions at La Montagne remained as uncertain as ever. The life the Indians led in the colony was as precarious as it had always been, growing more disjoined and more dependent every day.[78] If we are correct in assuming that most settlers crossed the seas to escape endemic poverty and to find an alternative to vagrancy, could their perception of the Indians they dominated – a perception spawned by regular contacts – act as a model to decipher the character of this peasantry in the making?

CHAPTER TWO

The French Population

1 PATTERN OF IMMIGRATION

In the spring of 1642 a party of fifty Frenchmen, representing the Société de Notre Dame de Montréal pour la conversion des Sauvages de la Nouvelle France,[1] set foot on the island that the Compagnie des Cent Associés donated for the furtherance of such pious plans. In the first ten years some one hundred and fifty individuals arrived in the settlement. The age pyramid from the 1666 census illustrates the initial difficulties: few remained in the upper cohorts, where these first immigrants should logically figure, for just a handful had persevered in this isolated spot, so vulnerable to Iroquois attacks.[2]

The arrival of about another two hundred persons in 1653 and 1659 revitalized a settlement few had expected to survive. As defence against ambush improved, the colonists ventured beyond the palisades to clear the land and build new houses. They married. The same bimodal pyramid clearly pinpoints this recovery, and census data indicate that from then on Montreal kept pace with the rest of the colony.[3] Immigration continued to be slow and irregular, with a short period of relative intensity between 1653 and 1672 that left a favourable annual balance in migration – about three hundred settlers – in the colony.

Three factors account for the rise in the population of Montreal: immigration from France, local migrations, and natural increase. One would need to estimate the latter in order to isolate gains through immigration, but this proved impossible: the under-registration of deaths, the uneven reliability of census data, and the added complication of regional instability all combine to blur the results.

About twelve hundred to fifteen hundred immigrants settled on the Island of Montreal between 1642 and 1714; 75 per cent remained.

Half came before 1670, after which arrivals sharply declined; but between 1695 and 1705 a sudden upsurge rectified this lag. If a sizable proportion came off the boats, newcomers also included four hundred discharged soldiers and people from other parts of the colony.

For 1681 – that is, immediately following the first wave of arrivals – immigration can be categorized as in Table 2. Indentured servants constituted the largest group, half of the males, excluding those still in service who potentially could go home. A smaller contingent of soldiers accounted for less than one-fifth of immigrants, while another fifth from miscellaneous backgrounds paid for their own passage. Nearly three-quarters of the women who embarked set off alone in search of husbands.

These categories could be reshuffled so that temporary immigrants might be distinguished from permanent settlers. The first group would comprise soldiers and indentured servants with short-term contracts and return tickets. Yet can one really ascertain the long-term intentions of unmarried workers who left for a three-year stint in Canada rather than trek across France and neighbouring countries?[5] Did distance imply more in that period? What about the soldier who enlisted for six years and had no say in his destination? Similarly, few merchants and officers perceived their transfer as definitive. In fact, only whole families or single women left France with no intention of returning.

Can one distinguish between forced and voluntary departures? Strictly speaking, forced migration could apply to women or to the odd prisoner forcibly enrolled into the colonial troops.[6] Actual deportation to New France was insignificant in the seventeenth century, but a broader definition of the term might well include almost everybody. Obviously people emigrated because of economic duress. But as long as they decided when to leave and where to go, or at least decided when to stay, can one not speak of voluntary relocation for economic reasons? There is little doubt that repulsion played as great a part as attraction. Yet economic difficulties, distress, and uncertainty characterized the entire century, and those who crossed the ocean to escape this fate were few. This thin trickle cannot be linked to the period's major crises.[7] Rather, it was the result of individual and serendipitous encounters, which prompted men to move beyond the usual migratory circuits. A country and a century so conspicuously concerned with increasing population gave little encouragement to such departures, and the response was on a similar scale.[8]

Eschewing, therefore, any elaborate model, I now describe the various groups of immigrants.

Table 2
Distribution of Montreal's population in 1681 according to the type of immigration[4]

Total enumerated			1,389
Born in the colony		888	
Male immigrants		340	
Ecclesiastics	10		
Officers and volunteer noblemen	12		
Merchants	15		
Volunteers with families	16		
Single volunteers (uncertain)	7		
Discharged soldiers	59		
Settled former indentured servants	150		
Indentured servants in 1681	71		
Female immigrants		161	
Nuns	17		
Servants in 1681	4		
Women and girls accompanying husband or parents	26		
Women and girls on their own	114		

Source: Census AC, G1, 460

2 FAMILIES

Twenty-four of the 111 families living in Montreal in 1666 had already been formed in France.[9] Kin groupings comprised only 15 per cent of arrivals prior to the first census,[10] and later on this proportion fell even lower. We know of only four instances where a family head arrived separately and then brought out his dependents.[11] Usually the whole family emigrated as a unit, albeit a modest one, with just one or two children. Half consisted of old couples or widowers with grown-up children. Thirteen families embarked together in 1659, from their native Aunis, La Rochelle, and, especially, the village of Marans. Such groups were likely to be related or to have forged strong bonds before the crossing, and they shared such kinship ties with several unmarried *engagés*, or indentured labourers, who arrived at the same time. These families were poor, and the religious communities that recruited them advanced their fares in return for labour and other forms of payment. Although they were not bound by work contracts, their material and social position differed little from that of the *engagés*. The Sovereign Council, however, looked askance at immigrants with a one-way passage, who might come to depend on colonial largesse.[12]

Some of the Société de Notre-Dame's early recruits fared quite well, reflecting personal qualities that the tiny settlement and harsh living conditions brought to the fore. Natives of Igé en Perche, a carpenter, his wife, and five children, had accompanied the founders in 1642 and were followed a year later by his sister, her husband (a *laboureur*, it would seem), and their four children. In 1646 the carpenter returned home to sell his property and still had 800 livres due to him from the proceeds when he left for Montreal, again taking two young fellow-villagers into his service: they were followed by at least three more in the next few years.[13] The rather sizable emigration from this village containing but fifty households seems to have been inspired by local example rather than by poverty. Such immigrant families generally solidified the already enviable positions they had achieved in their places of origins. The first syndics and churchwardens issued from their ranks, and chance alliances worked in their favour. Single merchants and the choicest of early recruits married their daughters, disdaining the shipload of females sent over by the Crown to steady the *engagés*. This group of families along with a few single settlers ensured the survival of the trading post in the earliest decade, and such antecedence granted them the special status they would enjoy for two generations.

3 GENTLEMEN-SOLDIERS

Between 1642 and 1662 a score of men arrived in Montreal for whom soldiering was emblematic of their station rather than an occupation. The pronounced martial character of French society had been recently refuelled by the wars of religion and the Fronde. But while some of the gentilshommes who came to Canada belonged to the lower nobility, others were members of a provincial bourgeoisie with similar tastes for combat and a hankering after easy promotion.[14] These men formed the core of Ville-Marie's first notables. Not a one, including the local governor, had ever held a commission in the army (for, had they been discharged, their rank would certainly have appeared in the records). In short, they were the well-born who had failed to become officers and who had either served in the ranks or as members of some local company raised by provincial aristocrats. This was still common practice and did not, in and of itself, signify a loss of status.

Among the early arrivals, "fort soldiers" of good birth received fiefs and arrière-fiefs. Those serving as staff officers were remunerated by the Compagnie des Habitants, and they supplemented these payments with profits from the fur trade, which rapidly consumed

their energies. A modicum of education allowed some to occupy the civil offices available in the seigneury. They were also used to lead the militia. After 1685, when Canada received a definite military organization, officers' commissions would be awarded in these families in recognition of past services and as a nod to their genteel birth. The second generation kept alive the military ideals that had brought their fathers to the colony.[15] These first Montrealers and other gentilshommes who had settled in Quebec or Acadia in Louis XIII's reign shared a chivalric tradition that encompassed both individual bravery and banditry.[16] These values corresponded so closely to those of Indian society that, instead of influence, we might well speak of encounter.[17]

While volunteers with similar social backgrounds still arrived in the second half of the seventeenth century, they were less soldiers than adventurers. They included Norman gentilshommes such as Dominique La Motte, who, in the wake of de la Salle, arrived too late and had problems meshing into a society where military promotion played such an important role and even adventure was prey to centralizing pressures.

The colonial authorities encouraged this sort of immigration in the decade that followed the establishment of royal government. The Sovereign Council supported for a year, at the King's expense, "six young men of good extraction who had paid for their crossing."[18] The intendant welcomed with open arms a young gentleman who had come to Canada "to get a feel for the lay of the land." "If persons of such quality follow suit," he exulted, "Canada will soon be filled with people who might adequately ensure its survival."[19] Several unhappy incidents combined with the proliferation of the local petty nobility soon dampened such enthusiasm.

4 INDENTURED LABOUR

The system

The system of indentured labour in the colonies represented no more than a variant of short-term service contracts. It was not unusual to part with one's freedom for specific periods, usually fairly lengthy or even perpetual – that is to say, indeterminate – if one became an apprentice, a servant, a soldier, or a sailor. Although Debien feels that indentureships in Canada derived from fishing contracts, it seems more likely that their origins lie in the widespread patterns of servitude familiar to people in the interior and on the Atlantic coasts of France.[20] In the early seventeenth century the

Virginia Company quite naturally had recourse to indentureship in order to people its plantations. This was considered preferable to forced conscription, and the system was favoured for similar reasons by French planters in the West Indies.[21]

Trading companies and a few colonists began by enlisting their labourers personally. They subsidized their crossing, provided for their keep, and paid their wages. For the system to be worthwhile, it had to generate sufficient profits to offset unavoidable losses by death, illness, or desertion, above and beyond the expected cost of enrolment and transport. The higher the number and the lengthier the contract, the better the chances of absorbing expected and unexpected expenditures. This implied that whatever these men produced had to find quick and profitable outlets. Yet, given the wretched development of Canada in the first half of the seventeenth century, the question is not why settlement lagged but rather how the colonists managed in these unfavourable conditions to bring over several hundred labourers. The only remunerative activity, the fur trade, did not require as many, so non-lucrative motives had to be invoked to promote this slight but steady inflow. Once the warehouses had a large enough contingent, the Church and its followers took over this unprofitable recruitment.

Almost all of the two hundred and fifty people who came to the Island of Montreal between 1642 and 1653 were hired by the Société de Notre-Dame, at a resounding loss. Having thus immobilized 300,000 livres, the society had to sit tight until the workforce generated returns, by land clearance and other labour, that, could recover some of that huge capital investment. The society hovered on the brink of bankruptcy.[22] Defraying the expense of recruitment, travel, and a few personal effects had exhausted its reserves. The society could simply not afford to support for five years the one hundred or so hands drafted in 1653 and pay the wages they were promised. Non-economic motivations (survival of the establishment for evangelical purposes) prompted further recruitment to replace the dead or missing. For a while yet furs would provide the only source of profit. The society did not disdain them, but its representative, de Maisonneuve, had to share the returns with his servants through fear of losing both returns and servants.

Granting these penniless men their freedom was no solution, for they required seeds, tools, and trade goods to make it on their own. This explains those curious transactions that freed the *engagés* upon landing, although they had to acknowledge a debt of 300 to 500 livres towards the governor to cover their fare and past and future advances.[23] These private agreements specified that those who

settled permanently in Montreal would not be held accountable. Two-thirds of the 1653 contingent refused their freedom under such conditions, which underlines the temporary nature of their immigration as well as their doubts concerning the company's liquidity.[24] Ten years later, three of the assenters sued the governor to obtain their so-called bonus, or, alternatively, to void the debt acknowledgement they had signed, which restricted their freedom of movement and mortgaged their lot.[25] They lost the suit, and those who left the seigneury had to refund the amount.[26]

In fact, prior to 1655 indentured servants who came to Montreal found no masters. Around Quebec, by contrast, the system operated quite normally. The leaders of the Compagnie des Habitants did quite well for themselves: ships arrived that needed refitting; the price of wheat was high; and the first colonists needed workers to clear the land. These had to be fed, and a chain reaction set in that made it profitable for a time to import labour. Between 1655 and the creation of the Compagnie des Indes occidentales in 1664, the merchants of La Rochelle, Rouen, and the colony enlisted more men than the requisite *engagé* per ton of freight demanded by the Quebec Council.[27] This suggests that those who traded in this workforce got something out of it, as did those who had been shipping them to the Caribbean islands since 1645 or to the English colonies since 1625.[28] The buyer refunded the passage and various advances to these traders, who could make a profit if the buyer's estimates were high. As will be argued below, well-placed and enterprising colonists benefited from the system in other ways.

Montreal did not remain long on the sidelines. Merchants arrived along with the priests of the Compagnie de Saint-Sulpice, the Société de Notre-Dame's successors.[29] It was the latter who brought over a sizable group of families, servants, and single women in 1659, while merchants' recruits came up from Quebec. From then on, indenture contracts ran their usual course.

When Canada came under the administrative control of the French Ministry of Marine in 1663, settlement became a priority. Colbert wanted to send colonists, but the Sovereign Council argued that the two hundred men shipped annually by the Compagnie des Indes occidentales, between 1664 and 1667, would be put to better use as contract labour.[30] The Council's insistence is further proof that the system set up by the merchants was quite profitable. Metropolitan shippers did well by recruiting for the state, while colonial merchants profited from a cheap labour pool that cleared their land at the very time when government expenditures and the arrival of troops stimulated an unprecedented boom. Labour needs were soon met, however, and following this expansionary phase the number of

engagés sent to New France dropped dramatically. As in earlier days, most were recruited directly, either by private individuals or by religious communities.[31] French outfitters had trouble meeting the official quota, based on their freight tonnage.[32]

Once it had been established, the local agricultural system based on family farms required little outside labour. Even New England, which was more developed, did not depend much on indentureships.[33] Montreal homesteaders relied on their sons, on a small pool of local labourers, and also on soldiers for seasonal work; the latter, like the prisoners in the eighteenth century, represented a cheap source of labour, recruited through the good offices of the Crown.[34] Ship's captains could only respond to this competition and get rid of their small cargoes by bringing in boys at appallingly low wages.[35] Later on, the hiring of Indians for domestic service would have a similar effect: the ratio of skilled workers among indentured immigrants decreased, and qualified persons had to be recruited on an individual basis and commanded top prices.[36]

Profile of the recruits

In the spring of 1653 Jerome LeRoyer de la Dauversière, a La Flèche tax collector and founding member of the Société de Notre-Dame, signed on 119 youths from the town and surrounding parishes. It was just after the Fronde. Only a few months had passed since the armies of the princes and royal mercenaries had devastated the area around Angers, and after the crisis of 1649–52 prices had begun to collapse.[37] He would have had no problems hiring under such circumstances. But as the overall situation improved between March and June 1653 (the sailing date from Nantes), almost half reneged on their promise, more confident about their prospects. The quotas were filled, on the eve of departure, with men hired on the waterfront. With a notary present, each was handed a chest and a few personal effects as an advance, and the contingent was carefully watched until the ship left its moorings. Of the 103 indentured servants counted at the outset, 8 apparently perished at sea.[38]

We can do no more than conjecture about the prior history of recruits who arrived before 1659, for only the passenger list has survived. They included families, marriageable girls, but only thirty indentured labourers. While the 1653 labourers had been recruited for the Société de Notre-Dame, these men came to serve the Sulpicians, the nuns who had travelled with them, and colonists who awaited them in Montreal. Some had been hired at La Flèche and others in Aunis, whence the vessel set sail.

All these men made similar commitments. They agreed to serve