

WHAT SHAPED CANADIEN CULTURE?

Have you ever wondered how different cultures develop? Why do people speak different languages, eat certain foods, or have different beliefs? Some parts of a culture remain the same over time, and some parts change.

ORIGINS OF CANADIEN CULTURE

When the first permanent settlers travelled from France to North America in 1608, they probably never imagined they would change over time to become a distinct people. In some ways, the French settlers never let go of the traditions and culture of their past. In other ways, however, they adapted to their new land. For example, the settlers in New France still spoke French, but they developed a new dialect called *canadien-français*. This dialect of French has its own distinct expressions and words. For example, *poudrerie* (drifting snow) reflected the environment of New France. Words such as *toboggan*, *moose*, and *squash* were learned from First Nations peoples. The settlers began to call themselves *Canadiens* to differentiate themselves from the French who lived in France and other French-speaking people in North America, such as the Acadians.

HABITANTS

Most of the Canadien settlers who lived along the St. Lawrence River were farmers, called **habitants**. The settlements of the habitants were part of the seigneurial system that you learned about in Chapter 1. **Figure 2.1** shows a habitant farm. In 1713, the average amount of cleared land that each habitant had to farm was about the size of a football field. This was not big enough to support the needs of a large family. In response, habitants learned to fish, hunt, harvest timber, and trap animals.

FIGURE 2.1 Cornelius Krieghoff painted *The Habitant Farm* in 1856. Habitants built their homes with steep roofs so that the heavy snows would slide off. **Analyze:** What other adaptations to the environment can you spot in this painting?



Does referring to themselves as “Canadiens” indicate a turning point in the development of French Canadian identity? Why, or why not?

habitant French settler who farmed a small plot of land in what is now Québec

THE CANADIENS AND THE FUR TRADE

Many Canadiens took part in the fur trade. They travelled far from home for long periods of time to find furs.

COUREURS DE BOIS

Many Canadien fur traders were known as **coureurs de bois**, which translates directly as “wood runners” but was used by the Canadiens to mean fur traders. The coureurs de bois met with First Nations trappers and purchased furs in exchange for goods such as wire, cloth, reading glasses, and guns. The coureurs de bois took on some of the habits, clothing, and practices of the First Nations with whom they interacted. Learning from the First Nations helped them survive. It was a working partnership that benefited both parties.

The coureurs de bois encountered many challenges on their journeys. In 1749, Pehr Kalm, a Swedish scientist, came to North America to collect seeds and plants. Examine **Figure 2.2**. What are Kalm’s thoughts about the life of the coureurs de bois?

coureur de bois an independent French Canadian fur trader who travelled deep into the forests of New France

“It is inconceivable what hardships the [coureurs de bois] must undergo on their hunting journeys. Sometimes, they must carry their goods a great way by land ... They often suffer hunger, thirst, heat, and cold, and ... dangerous animals and insects.”
— Pehr Kalm, Swedish scientist

FIGURE 2.2 An excerpt from Kalm’s journal written during a visit to North America in 1749. **Analyze:** What image of the coureurs de bois does Kalm want to convey to his readers?

VOYAGEURS

As the fur trade expanded in the early 1700s, fur trading developed into small businesses. Some Canadiens became **voyageurs**. Voyageurs were canoeists who worked for fur trading firms. Unlike the coureurs de bois, the voyageurs could not trade or sell furs. Instead, they travelled by canoe to transport furs and goods for the fur trade. **Figure 2.3** depicts their travels. What does the painting tell you about the life of a voyageur?

voyageur a professional canoeist who transported furs



FIGURE 2.3 This 1879 painting by Frances Anne Hopkins entitled *Shooting the Rapids* shows a scene in the workday of a voyageur. **Analyze:** What can you see in this painting that may have been influenced by First Nations peoples?

GATHER AND ORGANIZE

To investigate the past, you must start gathering evidence or information, keeping your inquiry question in mind. Then you need to organize the information in a way that will help you understand and analyze it.

When you collect your evidence,

- keep your inquiry question in mind
- organize and record your evidence in a way that will help you understand it
- make sure that you use reliable sources
- investigate different sources and perspectives
- make a list of all the sources you have chosen to use

CASE STUDY: THE LIVES OF THE VOYAGEURS

As the fur trade industry developed in New France, it sparked increased demand for labourers. Canadian voyageurs were the main labour force for the fur trade in New France. Fur trade companies needed voyageurs to transport their goods, such as furs and supplies, to trading posts by canoe.

Consider this inquiry question to help you dig deeper into the lives of the voyageurs: How did the lives and experiences of the voyageurs differ from those of other settlers? Organize the evidence presented in this case study so that it is meaningful to you.

Many of the trading posts were located in First Nations territories, so the voyageurs were in frequent contact with First Nations people. Examine **Figure 2.4**, which is a secondary source from historian Carolyn Podruchny. Podruchny lists the ways that First Nations influenced the voyageurs. How could you organize the content about the influence of First Nations on the voyageurs presented in **Figure 2.4**?



“[Voyageurs] travelled great distances and met speakers of Iroquoian, Algonquin, Athapaskan, Siouan, Salishan, and Wakashan languages, and even Inuit. Voyageurs adopted Aboriginal technologies to survive harsh conditions of living in the [wilderness]. They ate Aboriginal food, dressed in Aboriginal clothing, and used Aboriginal tools along with their own ... coming into close contact with Aboriginal people offered voyageurs a new kind of life unknown to the habitants ...”

— Carolyn Podruchny, historian

FIGURE 2.4 In this excerpt from her 2006 book, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade*, Podruchny comments on the interactions between the voyageurs and different First Nations peoples. **Analyze:** How would encountering these First Nations have changed the lives of the voyageurs?

Voyageurs were often fond of the freedom and independence that their jobs gave them. In exchange, they had to endure tough, dangerous working conditions. The voyageurs worked 16- to 18-hour days, beginning in the middle of the night. Sometimes the waterways they were travelling on turned into fierce rapids. This meant that the voyageurs would have to unload all of their goods from the canoe, haul everything overland, and then reload in calmer waters. Every 6 or 8 km, voyageurs would stop to smoke their pipes. Voyageurs began measuring each route using the number of “pipes” it took to complete.

Along with their pipes, the voyageurs had very distinctive accessories and clothing. Voyageurs often dressed in a blue capote, or long coat with a hood, deer skin leggings, a bright red sash that had a beaded pipe bag tied to it, and beaded moccasins. Examine **Figure 2.5**, which shows voyageurs setting up camp along the water. What other kinds of sources could help you understand what voyageur life was like?

FIGURE 2.5 This 1871 painting, entitled *Voyageurs at Dawn* by Frances Anne Hopkins, shows a typical voyageur camp. **Analyze:** What unique skills do you think voyageurs might have learned that other habitant settlers might not have learned?

TRY IT

1. Use a graphic organizer to organize the information on pages 50 to 51 so that you can respond to the inquiry question. Find a partner and compare how you organized the information. Explain why you think your organizing tool is appropriate.
2. Use the criteria from page 50 to identify any areas where you need more information. For example, ask yourself these questions: Are multiple perspectives represented? Whose viewpoint is missing? Are both primary and secondary sources included? Add any relevant information to your organizer.



FIGURE 2.6 This was painted by an unknown painter around 1710. It shows nuns caring for the sick in an abbey. **Analyze:** What does this painting tell you about healthcare in the early 1700s?

RELIGION

By 1713, French settlers had been living in New France for more than two or three generations. Most had never lived in France or visited Europe. However, they still held the same religious beliefs as those living in France, which was a Catholic country.

The French King Louis XIV had permitted only Catholics to settle in New France, so nearly all the people living in New France at this time were Catholic. But because there was a lack of priests in New France, the majority of Canadiens were only able to attend church services a few times each year. Despite this, the Catholic Church played a central role in people's lives.

The parish priests served as local leaders and set up important institutions, such as schools and hospitals, that the Canadiens needed. The Catholic Church was the only provider of healthcare in New France during this time. Hospitals were often run by nuns. The first hospital in New France, called Hôtel-Dieu, was built in Québec City in 1639. It was run by a group of nursing nuns called the Hospitaller Sisters and is still open today. Examine **Figure 2.6**, which shows nuns caring for the sick in the early 1700s. What connections can you make between New France's charitable hospitals and Canada's healthcare system today?

The Canadiens demonstrated their Catholic beliefs in traditional ways. For example, they painted votive paintings, which are paintings by ordinary people that express thanks to Catholic saints for miracles. These kinds of paintings were common in France. Settlers in New France continued to create votive paintings for centuries.

CANADIEN WOMEN

Earlier in this section, in **Figure 2.2**, you read Kalm's description of the life of the *coureurs de bois*. Read **Figure 2.7** to learn his thoughts about Canadien women.

Several factors shifted Canadien culture toward greater independence for women. Because of their circumstances, Canadien women had to be versatile and self-reliant. They learned how to cook with the foods that were available in North America, such as venison (deer meat), corn, and maple syrup. Without easy access to stores or ready-made clothing, they sewed their family's clothes and made meals from scratch. Women whose husbands left for weeks or months at a time to trade furs maintained the family farm on their own. As a result, women in New France enjoyed a level of independence that was not available to women in the British colonies or in France.

EDUCATION AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Greater access to education was another way Canadien women could become more independent. Some girls were able to receive an education from Catholic nuns. Canadien women used the literacy skills they learned to work in commercial businesses. Some even ran their own businesses, such as mills, factories, and tanneries. This was possible because of a law passed in 1690 in New France. Eager to spark the colony's economy, officials in New France allowed nobles, including women, to engage in business. Nobles were wealthy people with high social status. **Figure 2.8** shows Marie-Charlotte Denys de la Ronde, a Canadien woman who ran a sawmill. This was very different from the situation in France and the British colonies. Women there were not encouraged to work or own their own businesses.

“[Unlike men in Europe, Canadien men did not undertake] matters of importance without their women's advice and approval.”
— Pehr Kalm, Swedish scientist

FIGURE 2.7 Kalm wrote this observation during a 1749 visit to New France. **Analyze:** What does Kalm's observation say about the role of women in New France?



FIGURE 2.8 This reproduction of a portrait of Marie-Charlotte Denys de la Ronde was painted by Saint-Marc Moutillet in the 1950s. **Analyze:** Judging by the details in the painting, was Denys de la Ronde a habitant or a noble?

CHECK-IN

- GATHER AND ORGANIZE** Create a chart listing changes that influenced New France to develop a distinct Canadien culture. Identify the source of each change. Which changes resulted from interactions with another group of people?
- HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE** Use evidence from this section to write a journal entry from the perspective of a young *coureur de bois* or Canadien businesswoman. Include aspects of daily life.